

The Devil's Door



Thuban Etoile

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Compiled by Thuban Etoile ♀

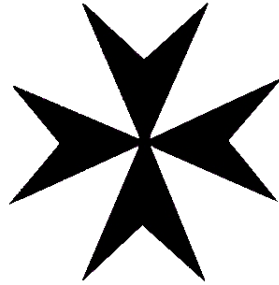
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The complete compiled story pages of Lyra Swan and the Diary of Zaethian Laurent Salé - *'Nuances Éternelles de Nuit'*.

All characters appearing in this work are fictitious and entirely fabricated by the author's demented imagination. Any resemblance to real persons, mythical creatures or otherworldly entities, living or dead, is purely coincidental.



For All My Knights



When enduring the painful agonies of human suffering, there are those that beg God to grant them wishes like a genie in a bottle to save them from their woes, and when the deaf God fails to ease their misery, in despair they turn to the powers of Darkness for help.

Some meddle in the dark arts blindly, entreating demons allowing them to gain a foothold in this dimension, not realising that they had let something in, so ancient, so evil, it knows everything you fear.

Once that threshold is crossed into the darkness, all efforts to gain one's freedom seem futile and every path an endless maze. There are only a few who may escape its labyrinth to behold the light, and those who become lost in its black embrace remain trapped in the Eternal Shades of Night.

life's story is but a journey through
the unfathomable darkness and
the struggle against the forces
of the Kabbalah's black tree
to succeed on the path
of shadows towards
self-knowledge





Dark Waters

Lyra Swan lit a fire and reclined in the soft leather chair to read a book in the study but became distracted intermittently by the hypnotic dancing flames seducing her, focusing on the element of fire rather than that of the story. It started to rain so she walked out the French doors of the study onto the small patio to grab the forgotten notebook she had left on the table where she enjoyed her tea earlier that afternoon. It was dark outside and deathly quiet, nothing like the noisy madness of London.

Lyra sighed deeply with exhaustion then breathed in the cool spring air and thought she heard something like dead leaves stirring, causing her some disquiet. The smell of the moist earth and fragrant shrubs hung on the night air, its thick earthy perfume enveloping her in poignancy as she wondered what purpose she had in this world. Was this all there was to life, existing just to struggle, suffer and die?

A gust of wind blew wet drops upon her cheeks snapping her out of sombre ruminations. She went back inside listening to the



light pattering of droplets upon the roof, the rhythm of its heavenly song flooding her with intense emotions that stirred up long forgotten memories.

She recalled when she was on holiday in New South Wales staying with her folks. She was in her twenties at the time having a mind-set of fearlessness and a feeling of invincibility that one usually has when they are younger. It was late in the afternoon on a hot day and she decided to go for a swim. Buoyantly floating over each crest with closed eyes, her mind merged with the expansive sea.

The warm water and hot sun must have lulled her into a languor because upon opening her eyes, she was further out into the ocean than she realised and concluded there must have been an undertow. The wind had picked up and the swells were getting increasingly bigger as if the tide was coming in or a storm was brewing pulling the waters. Instantly thinking of sharks she started to panic as she swam for the beach and for her life. The sets were coming faster, the waves were getting larger, and she was swiftly drifting further along the coast from the place where she had entered the water. Lyra struggled against the riptide using up all of her strength to fight the waves that kept pounding on top of her.

Then it came, an enormous monster wave that was impossible to go over and inconceivable to out swim, and she knew as it took her under to the bottom that she might not come back up again. Holding her breath feeling herself tumbling upon the sand, her lungs were about to burst and she did not know which way was up after the fourth revolution.



There was a moment of complete blackness as Lyra rested in Mother Nature's depths, swallowed by her sea. She did not panic but instead felt a sense of peace even though she knew she was drowning, and flowed in a vast space of timelessness, all thoughts draining from her. When she had surrendered completely she was jolted back into awareness and suddenly ejected to the surface, breathing in the vital air. She was close enough now to the beach to stand up in the water but was hardly able to walk onto shore, stumbling, practically crawling in the sand.

Her legs were weak and shaking, her ears full of water and her eyes burned with grits of sand. She felt dizzy and tried to regain some composure then walked as far as she could to get away from those terrible waters and sat down to rest, remaining there for some time in a daze. She was even too exhausted to cry. Every emotion was knocked out of her by the violent sea, even her pride. Never again would she underestimate the power of nature and never again would she allow her ego to become so inflated with arrogance. She thought of a line in a nursery rhyme, *'Can't catch me I'm the Gingerbread man.'* No one is invincible. We all fall.

Your amour propre will eventually catch up to you and take you down, because that's when Lyra had her first taste of crow. It was a bitter banquet but it was also a milestone and she was still alive to recount it. Fate is a fickle bitch; she'll smile upon you one moment then twist it the next.



Istanbul

The Fortuneteller

CIRCA 1900'S

I had a strange dream that I was in İstanbul, it was so real that I resolved to record my tale as the old gypsy woman from the dream instructed me. I happened upon her in a back-alley bazaar of the old quarter. This was not the first time I found myself mysteriously inveigled into a strange place and if you read on you will understand my somewhat apathetic acceptance of the supernatural.



I was wandering the streets feeling discontent and irresolute as the Akşam Ezanı rang out mellifluously over the temperate tiger lily sky.

Not caring where I was going, chance led me down an ancient cobbled street where an old woman beckoned me from a dark corner. The beldame took me by surprise, no one ever sought me out, and I always kept to myself. I kept to the shadows.

She wore colourful ill-assorted clothing with a floral scarf wrapped haphazardly around her hoary head, long plaits of grey hair entwined with strips of red fabric hanging down around her neck that was bedizened with strands of cheap jewellery. I remained silent humouring her and took a seat in a battered wooden chair with a worn viridian cushion having faded fringe of which most of the tassels were missing.

She sat opposite me at a small table then reaching underneath it, took my hand in her leathery palm and rested it upon the table with hers still in clutch.

“I can see that the devil has pissed on you.”

I could not suppress a laugh at the banality of her words, while nevertheless wondering if she really knew how true they were.

“Is it that obvious?” I asked with a certain grim amusement, but the mirth quickly left me turning into a doleful countenance and I struggled to maintain my comportment. I was about to get up and leave but she gripped my hand tighter.

“I can also see that all is not lost, there is hope yet, please stay and hear what the cards will unveil.”

She relaxed her grip and I went still as she stared at me with eyes the colour of chrysoprase. Those olive-green gems bore into



my very soul and I knew she spoke the truth even if it was only her belief, but I was intrigued enough to stay and listen. What else did I have to do? What else did I have to lose? Nothing.

“Very well, I will listen at your insistence,” I said as I relaxed, leaning back in the chair, she released her hold on me then reached for a deck of tarot cards.

I was skeptical and took her for an obscurantist like most soothsayers who never commit to precise details since there was safety in vagueness and each individual could construe a different meaning. I already knew my fate and what abomination had cursed me, but did she?

The gypsy proceeded to recount events in my life speaking very slowly in mesmeric tones while flipping the cards over and laying them upon the table with just as much intensiveness.

I listened patiently, although my mind was wandering through the vivid scenes of my haunted memories, recollecting the past horrors that had assailed me. When she came to the last card she paused drawing upon my anticipation as if she were about to reveal some great mystery and expected me to hang on her every word, but instead I just raised my left eyebrow quizzically and smirked with mocking indifference.

“It is for this card alone that our paths have crossed, for in it holds the thread of possibility and your chance for redemption, but that choice is for you to make, I can only show you the path. You must first take action in order to achieve this desired outcome, for every cause has an effect.

“Do not despair any longer my old friend, for in this card lies your only hope. What you are seeking is in another time and place.



You must return from whence you came and the answer will be revealed to you.”

A glint of promise shone in her perspicacious green eyes and I felt a keen sense of optimism, but then it was tempered by doubts, not daring to believe the encouragement of her words only to become disappointed with false asseverations that never came true. I sighed heavily and she must have sensed my resolve because she suddenly stood up chuntering and pointed her crooked brown finger at me.

“Mark my words friend, seize this opportunity that will save you from your plight, you will never have another. Now listen attentively, the first thing you must do is relate the story of your demise and your liberator will manifest. You have nothing to lose, just TRY.”

She continued with her instructions and I nodded humbly submitting to her advice of my own volition, cognisant of the fact that I was left with no alternatives. I presented her with money but she refused even though it was a large sum and only shook her head smiling at me. “Not all are adversaries.” She patted my shoulder as I stood and walked out of the hovel with a meek disposition then went out into the star filled night no longer cursing the heavens for my fate. Hope, she had given me hope.

I awoke and bestirred myself to commence my tale, taking you through the gates of hell with me. I will write through the dark hours each night until my story has been told. I am chainless but bound to this forsaken eternity like Prometheus in everlasting punishment awaiting his blessed release, and this also being my one desire, to be set free. My personal war rages as each hour I wrestle with unbridled forces, my thoughts made incarnate and my



demons manifest in this uncontrolled dominion of darkness. These may be things beyond your comprehension, but perhaps you may understand when you read the events that had befallen me.

The old woman told me I would be writing this diary to the one who will cross destinies with me. That one is you. Since time does not exist for me, I only have to wait for you to read my tale, and leave my fate in your hands.

Therefore, My Dear One, I will attempt to recount the events that have brought me to my current state, forgive me if I fail to stay apposite in the telling of my tale, but such reflexions tend to engulf me with sentimentalism and despondency that stems from existing in an eternity of solitude and darkness.

I ask not for your sympathy, for the devil cares for none, but only for your understanding. I hope for such a miracle, as your light alone can redeem me from this fate of everlasting night, though I dare not demand it of you. Your promised coming is my only refuge to vanquish these soul-corroding fears of helplessness and dispelling my woe on this earthly plane, this sphere of terrestrial decay. My senses are numbed by the loss of light and this darkness holds only torment and destruction, be then my light, my beacon to guide me home.

If you fain to seek me out, I wait in the shadows my Dear One, ever I have been waiting for you in these unfading days, in these Eternal Shades of Night.

Yours throughout eternity,

Zaethian Laurent Salé





Cube of Space

Lyra Swan felt she was living her life backwards and everything seemed reversed like climbing an upside down tree, descending rather than ascending. For her, light is not shining down. Instead it is the darkness rising up. She walked lost along a path of shadows never glimpsing any clear view of reality, smothered by an enveloping poignancy it strangles all sense of direction and eradicates any glimmer of hope as if the soul of Lilith possesses her utterly. The dark manifests, it is an energy and entity of itself. There is no vacuum, the void breathes as if alive with a million vile and terrifying things, was this a magickal journey from Kether to Malkuth?

Quitting her position at the firm had been the toughest choice, getting a divorce was indisputable. Both however were necessary since they happened to work at the same company. All of her friends warned her about dating someone at her place of employment since it always led to inevitable repercussions. Never fish off the same pier. Leaving her ex was the easy choice because



in retrospect she had realised that she never really loved him, mistaking real love for transient emotions that faded like dead roses once cut from their life source.

Lyra's parents retired and moved to Point Piper, New South Wales many years ago, leaving her the family house in Midlothian that had once belonged to her grandparents, so she left London and moved into the old place that held so many happy memories of childhood holidays spent with family.

She needed to keep busy for her own sanity rather than sloth around in idleness. Too much time on one's hands causes the mind to remembering the past, a past that she wished could be erased like a computer file, but even then, there is still a ghost in the machine imprinted on its magnets, ghosts that haunt throughout eternity.

She thought she'd take some time to acclimate to Scotland and think about what direction her life would take, as long as it meant doing something worthwhile to keep her occupied. Having a 'Monkey Mind', her thoughts tended to ramble on, making her quite sick of her own head speak, and needed constant chastising to quiet the mind.

For the past three nights now, reoccurring dreams have ghosted her with visions so vivid in detail that it seems more of a lost memory than a dream. Still haunted by that dream, she walked around the house all morning disconnected from the present.

The nightmare must be from the stress of relocating and the change in lifestyle, and she was trying hard to convince herself of the logical explanation but somewhere deep inside she knew there was a different reason, an even darker purpose that bordered on the metaphysical or supernatural. It was a rampant dominion of darkness scratching at her door, waiting like a wolf in the night.



The furniture removers were arriving today so Lyra planned to unpack the boxes and arrange everything. She would have to buy something to fill the blank spaces on the walls in the sitting room where a picture of her grandparents used to hang, as well as the missing painting from the bedroom, both which were shipped off with her parents down under.

She wrote a list of things to do along with some ideas regarding her future. The day wore on and she began to feel hollow as she went through her tasks like an automaton. The removers arrived late so she decided to unpack only the clothes and crucial items, deferring the nonessentials for another day. She had them stack everything in the sitting room, using it as a staging area since she had no idea where to put anything at the moment.

After countless cups of tea, she managed to organise and stow things away nicely, then looked for furniture stores on the internet to find some decorations or paintings to cover the two bare walls. Her search was unsuccessful, everything appeared rather modern and the contemporary styles found online would clash awfully with her grandparent's old furniture.

She broke down the empty boxes and took them out to the rubbish bin in the garage for recycle then carried one of the heavy boxes of books into the study.

By the time Lyra did the washing up in the kitchen it was 10.10 PM so she locked up and headed for bed. She tossed and turned trying to get comfortable and calm her mind. Thinking of starlit nights by the sea, she lay down in the darkness feeling a soothing wave wash over her and fell into deep fathoms of sleep as if night herself held Lyra in her bosom and lulled her with a narcotic calm that transcended layers consciousness and she dreamed.



She opened the black door of an old store in a row of shopfronts of a dilapidated old stone building. The black painted wood around the windowpanes was just as worn with antiquity as the miscellanea of items obscurely displayed through the darkened glass windows begrimed with the dust of many ages.

Immediately she is aware of the fusty smell of dampness, rotting wood and worn leather, even the air was antique. Looking around her with awe, she surveys the items cluttering the shop, wonderful old things tempting her curiosity, enticing her to explore further.

There are shelves of old books, crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling with price tags dangling from strings and countless tables littered with mélange. One table in particular displayed a candelabra adorned with cherubs, decorative boxes, a few carved wooden pipes, a brass spyglass and a stone statuette of Isis.

Several curio cabinets lined the wall housing bric-a-brac and a small rectangular display case held hatpins, brooches, tortoise shell combs, rings and gold pocket watches, but she did not stop to examine any of these objects.

Lyra continued on, walking past a throne chair amongst other odd styles of mismatched furniture from different eras, winding her way around them as if through a maze. Moving forward with unease she glanced at the daunting Scaramouche mask hanging on the wall, it looked wicked and gave her a fright.

She felt herself drawn to a mysterious black door at the rear of the shop, mesmerised by some unearthly glamour, and entered it with apprehension as if crossing the threshold of a demonic gateway into the netherworld. As she stepped through



that ancient entry, she had a feeling of travelling into another dimension of time.

It was dark inside save for a sinister dull light emitting from an old lamp which revealed a colossal china cabinet with floral designs carved into the decaying black wood. The black cabinet had dark yellow stained glass doors that concealed the contents within.

Lyra opened the centre cabinet door and held her breath, gazing at a gold framed mirror from foregone times. The glass is dark as if a shadow resides within it and she is compelled to stare into the mirror, almost searching for something. The shadow begins to move like smoke and she is startled that she does not see her own reflexion, but instead it is the image of a handsome gentleman dressed in Victorian-style clothing.

Watching him intently, her eyes fixed in wonder, he does not smile and only stares back at her with his absorbing gaze that pierces the core of her being. As Lyra reached out to touch the illusion in the glass, a strong grip suddenly seized her, forcibly pulling her forward into the darkness, engulfed by the shadow in the mirror.

All was black and she heard herself screaming. Turning around to look behind her where the scream had originated from, she gasped in horror as she saw herself on the other side of the mirror still in the old shop staring back at herself in the dark glass, split in two, existing between different dimensions.



Lyra awoke with a feeling of horror that resonated from her dream, and an eerie vibration of dread froze her with shock and disbelief. She sat up in silence riding waves of seismic emotions as if the earth were rolling in a fluid current and she was swept away by an unseen tide, feeling movement even though she was now sitting perfectly still.

She was haunted and disoriented, not recognising the present, as if days had gone by and she could not account for the lost time, wondering if we really do have alternate realities. Trying to shake off the disturbing dream, she got out of bed to begin her morning routine.

She stared at herself in the bathroom mirror and contemplated her life more than her image, lapsing into retrospection but with no regrets. Growing old was not her idea but she supposed we all had to succumb to the natural world.

She looked out the window at a grey dawn. It was a gloomy day and a light rain was falling as the foliage collected silver droplets like tiny reflective glass spheres and birds took shelter amongst the hazel and rowan trees.

She stared at the blank bedroom wall in front of her, it was bothering her and she really needed to cover that dark patch where the missing painting had been or she would have to repaint the whole wall, and if she had to repaint the whole wall, she might as well hire painters to do the whole house. She decided to get out of the house and drive to Edinburgh to look through some antique shops to replace the two missing paintings.

After a long hot shower, Lyra ate a light breakfast and looked up a few addresses of antique stores on the internet then drove into the city.



The rain continued as she circled around to find a place to park and drove a couple of blocks over cutting through a narrow cobbled alleyway in between the buildings when she saw an antique shop, though it wasn't one on her list. She slowed the car to have a look and her heart raced as she turned the corner and parked. Getting out of the car not bothering with a brolly, she walked back down the alley in the rain towards a small driveway between two separate buildings that ended at a wall.

She recognised that derelict ancient stone building and the three shopfronts that stood in a row, two of which were vacant with boarded up windows. She went to the middle shop and noticed the black paint on the windowpanes was chipped and weatherworn, but what she had not seen in her dream was the black sign hanging from wrought iron above the door, it had white letters that read '*Lasyrith Lubat Kayn*' and printed underneath this name was '*Oddities Shoppe*'.

Glancing passively at the horde of objects in the window she reached for the brass knob and opened the black door of the store. A crystal chandelier emitted a dim light and several lamps around the room added a warm glow but it did nothing to cheer the atmosphere. It was solemn and entirely silent but for a repetitious ticking from an old hand wound clock. The inside was larger than she had expected, there was a black door at the back of the shop on the far left and a white door on the back wall at the right side of the room. Between the two doors was a sales counter with a jacquard curtain behind it, probably leading to a storeroom.

There was no one about so she began to browse the vast salmagundi around her. The shop had a faint hint of Patchouli incense in the air and a feeling of familiarity overwhelmed her but



she did not recognise anything that she had seen in her dream. There was furniture everywhere, arranged in small groupings as if each were a separate parlour, but the pieces were of varying styles and oddly enough, it was pleasing to the eye, adding harmony to the chaos. Tables displayed lamps and collectibles and she had the feeling that she was in someone's home rather than a retail shop.

Lyra didn't see anything that she fancied and although there were shelves and curios with countless items, there were no paintings visible, just a few tapestries that hung on the walls amongst Victorian sconces. She walked back towards the front door to leave while laughing at herself for overreacting with panic at the first sight of the shop. Replaying that dream each night had focused her attention upon it so intensely that she was almost searching for evidence that it was true and not just her creative imagination.

As she turned her head, she was startled to see a very tall man standing behind the counter with a look of amusement on his face as though he read her thoughts and understood the nature of her humour. He was completely bald, having pale white skin and his elongated face had chiselled cheekbones and a prominent nose.

He moved towards her and his stature was truly overwhelming. He may have been in his forties though he seemed ageless, his skin was free from wrinkles and his bearing was majestic, giving her the opinion of being in the presence of royalty. He was inhumanly beautiful like some aeonian god, a far contrast from that of Vulcan forging metals in the underworld.

He wore a long black brocade kurta with black slacks on his lean frame and polished black leather shoes that looked expensive. She couldn't help feeling intimidated by his size and powerful presence, but when he smiled, her alarm and defensiveness melted



into an overwhelming sense of peace as if some psychic suggestion had abolished her fears telepathically.

“I beg your pardon. I didn’t see anyone when I came in, so I just had a look around. I hope you don’t mind,” she said hesitantly, afraid of staring at him impolitely.

“Not in the least. Allow me to introduce myself; I am Lasyrith Lubat Kayn, I serve as a custodian here.” He said eloquently half bowing.

“Hello, I’m Lyra Swan.”

“It is my utmost pleasure to make your acquaintance my dear Lyra. Was there a particular item that you were seeking?”

His eyes were so light coloured they looked like pale blue crystals and at that moment, she knew he must have read her mind for a strange energy seemed to pulse around him. He smiled and his penetrating gaze looked into her soul and she felt a queer tingling sensation down the back of her neck, images of the dream flashed in her mind but again a flow of serenity swept over her to quell any inquietude.

“Um, I guess I was expecting to find something to cover the two bare spots on my walls but I didn’t see anything that would suffice.”

“Please come with me. I have an additional inventory, as you can see, the antiques are displayed out front but the oddities are stored in the back room. It is wise not to expose such items in the display window to those with delicate sensibilities who would fail to appreciate them. There are certain things that should remain hidden. Perhaps I have just what you are looking for,” Lasyrith said as his eyes flashed a deep soulless black, then in an instant they seemed normal again and she thought it must have been an illusion or just a trick of the light.



He moved his long arms around her in a sweeping motion that also blocked the exit to the door, and she turned with trepidation to walk beside him as he guided her with noiseless footsteps to the black door at the left rear of the shop. He kept perfect step with her even though his long legs would normally have taken a much larger stride. Lyra felt like a paschal lamb being herded towards the slaughter, his tall form guarding her as though he thought she might suddenly take flight and escape.

Lasyrith must have sensed her alarm because he laid his hand upon her shoulder and the tension in her neck and shoulders relaxed instantly from his touch.

He extended his hand towards the black door as if offering her a choice and asked, "Are you afraid of the dark?"

"What do you mean?"

"When you look beyond your world of illusions into other dimensions, you must face your shadow self. Everyone has a darker half, to see the truth beyond the veil only takes remembering, and there are countless sleeping angels incognisant of their true nature until they awaken and realise just who they really are. *Post tenebras lux.*"

Lyra stared at him, mouth gaping like a codfish, she had heard but not fully understood what he was saying and her mind was still processing his words to ascertain their underlying meaning.

"Who are you?" she asked suspiciously with furrowed brows.

"Just a traveller who deals in restoration, I collect things on my many journeys. There are always those seeking the obscure." Lasyrith pointed to the black door in invitation, or rather it was more of a silent command, and quoted,



*“Animae, quibus altera fato ¹
Corpora debentur, Lethaci ad fluminis undam
Securos latices, et longa oblivia potant.”*

There was no doorknob, only a large doorknocker with the face of a devil. She reached for the knocker feeling rather foolish while tapping it lightly three times, and to her astonishment the black door swung open on its own, giving her the creeps. Before Lyra could turn around to leave, Lasyrith nudged her forward through the dark doorway. She was momentarily dizzy and a warping sensation gave her the idea of crossing the threshold into a different dimension.

The room was dark except for small nimbus of light from a mediaeval candelabra and a small bronze lamp with Tiffany glass emitting an otherworldly glow that revealed a vast collection of oddities all crammed together. There was a curious black table nearby venerating a statue of a clear quartz crystal sphinx. Old books, bottles, and numerous queer objects were cluttered on large black shelves, but the rest of the room lay deep in the shadows concealing any items housed there. Perhaps it was better not to know, ignorance is bliss.

She gasped when her eyes fell upon the massive carved wood cabinet from the dream. It had the same dark yellow glass doors. The enticement was so strong it filled her with expectation. She held her breath as she opened the centre cabinet and gazed at the ornate gilt framed mirror, knowing somehow that it would be there. She looked into the glass and saw amongst the shadows an image of woman sitting on a throne wearing a crown.

¹ "Those souls who for rebirth By Fate are destined, drink from Lethe's stream
Draughts of forgetfulness and long oblivion." Virgil - 'Aeneid'



She swallowed hard, her throat was dry and her nerves were tingling with electricity. She was in utter disbelief and wondered if she was having a paranormal experience.

“Ah, you have found that which you have been seeking. It is a very special piece, for you it may reveal shadows of the past, but I have another intriguing prize that may interest you,” said Lasyrith Lubat Kayn as he reached towards a stack of paintings leaning up against the wall, pulling one out from the middle in a swift yet graceful movement.

It was hard for Lyra to take her eyes away from the mirror and she reluctantly gave her attention to the painting that was presented to her. At first glance, it appeared to be a plain and uninteresting country landscape with a small dwelling and a mountain far off in the distant background, but on closer examination, an unexplainable feeling of enchantment overwhelmed her and she was attracted to it as if it was somehow familiar.

Lasyrith pointed his long manicured finger at the canvas and said in a mesmerising voice, “I see that it holds a certain fascination for you. The scenery depicted here is between Rennes-les-Bains and Rennes-Le-Château with the Pic de Bugarach behind it as if keeping watch and guarding its secrets. I am sure both the painting and the mirror will look exceptional on your bare walls, will they not?”

“Why yes, they’ll do rather nicely, they’re actually perfect but I must ask the price as they may be beyond what I had planned to spend,” Lyra said with some reservation. She was not one to haggle at a bazaar nor was she a wastrel, moderation has always been the key.

He smiled and his lip curled in amusement as if he was about to laugh but it froze on his mouth instead, then he looked directly into her eyes and said, “There are things beyond price that men



frivolously toss aside and others that are insignificant trifles which men would kill for, never seeing the value of a pearl of great price.

“I assure you the cost is fair and I insist that you take them both without further discussion of payment. Why not see how they will work for you. I will never ask more than what you are willing to pay, and if they do not complement your rooms, you have only to return them.” The candlelight flickered reflecting in his eyes and for a moment, they went completely black then shone again like celestite.

“Thank you for your consideration but it would probably be easier if I just paid you for them right now.”

“Really I insist,” Lasyrith’s tone inferred he would not be refused.

She stammered not knowing what to say as if making a bargain with the devil, “Uh, um, I guess that will be fine. Let me give you my credit card number so if I decide to keep them you can just charge my card.”

“That is quite unnecessary Lyra, might I suggest that you retain them a few weeks and the next time you are in the area you can stop by and give me your decision then.” Lasyrith’s pupils appeared to expand and contract in the glowing candle flames.

“Very well, let me bring my car around so I can get them loaded in.”

Her gaze went back to the mirror in the cabinet then she turned walking through the dark room and as she passed by the black table, Lyra could not help examining the statue of the crystal sphinx and let her fingers caress the cold polished stone.

“Beautiful is it not? Do not be devoured by the Sphinx, but learn its riddle instead.” Lasyrith was suddenly by her side, but



she had not seen him move, he came upon her silently like a stealthy cat hunting its prey.

“Yes, lovely. I can’t seem to take my eyes away from it,” she agreed with him and withdrew her touch.

“It is settled then, it is yours, you were meant to have it.”

Lasyrith gestured towards the black door and escorted her through the various oddities back into the room of antiques then opened the front door of the shop for her. Feeling dismissed, a thought popped into her mind of being in a queue with the cashier calling, “Next.” A deal with the devil indeed!

“I will wrap your acquisitions and bring them out to you,” he said with a curled smirk of his mouth, and Lyra swore he could read her mind.

“Thank you,” she said with genuine gratitude and hurried down the alley in the drizzle.

Minutes later she returned with the car and was surprised to see Lasyrith standing in the doorway with packages already wrapped up in brown paper. She could not fathom how he could have moved so fast and she just sat in the car staring at him in amazement until he smiled, shaking her out of momentary paralysis when she beheld that omnipotent grin.

Lasyrith loaded the three packages into the boot and they said farewells. She drove away in a cloud of mental confusion, her mind as brumous as the grey sky. She was starving and when looking at the clock she could not believe her eyes, it was already after three o’clock. Lyra could have sworn she had only been in that shop for a half an hour or an hour at the absolute max. She had come into town just after breakfast, how could have time slipped by?



Before returning home, she stopped at a restaurant for Tapas and mulled over the bizarre encounter with the strange trader while she ate. The whole idea of it was so surreal she was having a bit of difficulty processing the experience. It seemed unreal to have seen the same shop from her dream and finding that mirror was even more implausible.

A man in old clothes at the table next to her interrupted her dining experience by leaning over to offer his critique of her food and the selection of dishes she had ordered, and Lyra flinched as he spoke. He had prehistoric beast breath, like some ancient woolly mammoth that was frozen for thousands of years then thawed out, releasing a foul gas like a demon's breath.

It was positively revolting, akin to the stench of the Hydra's breath that could kill both man and beast. She could not endure it another second and said, "I beg your pardon," getting up instantly to remove herself from his presence and hastily walked away towards to the cashier to pay while resenting the words of apology, for she felt it was he who should be begging her pardon for his horrific odour. She turned to look back at the man who was now staring at her intently and smiling, his eyes flashed red as if from a photograph with a camera flash. They were the red eyes of a demon.

After arriving home, she unloaded the parcels from the car. The mirror was heavier than she realised and of course, it was of no consequence to Lasyrith who was holding all of the items as if they weighed no more than a feather. She retrieved a hammer and some wall hangers from the toolbox in the garage then tore off the paper from the enchanted painting of the mysterious French landscape to hang it in the sitting room.



She turned the painting over and noticed the wood backing was coming off the heavy frame, some of the nails that held the back on were missing and the wood was splitting around the nail holes. She was afraid if she hung it from the wire the weight of it would pull off the wood backing, and so she decided to remove the wood entirely and nail it on again in different spots, reattaching it onto the frame without reusing the same holes.

When she removed the back, there was a gap between the canvas and the wood backing, the frame had a depth of about seven centimetres. Lodged inside the cavity was an old black leather book that someone had secreted away. Lyra picked up the book inquiringly and opened it, the pages were old and the paper was faded in some places and stained in others. She flipped through pages examining the book with intrigue, wondering what mystery it contained since someone went through the trouble of stashing it. It was a handwritten diary entitled '*Nuances Éternelles de Nuit*'.

After reattaching the backing to the frame, she hung it up and stared at the picture not really ensuring if it was straight but because it was captivating, although normally a landscape picture would have struck her as just a dull and ordinary scene of the countryside. She stood at the back of the room and examined it from a different perspective noting that the hand-carved frame blended well with the old furniture, making the painting a perfect addition to the room. It covered the dark spot on the wall entirely. What were the odds?

The painting was absorbing her, there was something strange about it that was scratching at the back of her mind, the more she looked at it, she began to see a shadowy form that seemed to be hiding in the trees beyond the small dwelling, and it looked like a dark ghostly form. Moving forward to get a closer look at the canvas, Lyra shuddered suddenly overcome by an intense



foreboding. Up close, the form appeared to be just a patch of shade amongst the foliage, but the sinister feeling of it remained.

She shook off her hellish imaginings and proceeded to the bedroom, placing the black leather journal on the bedside table and the crystal sphinx on the shelf of the chiffonier then hurriedly removed the wrapping from the mirror. There was white card with black script partially stuck under the gilded frame.

Lasyrith Lubat Kayn
Oddities Shoppe
♀

Lyra went about completing the task of hanging the mirror above the bureau on the wall across from the bed, wondering if it was such a good idea. She would see herself in the mirror when she sat in the bed and imagined the horror of viewing her ghastly image upon waking each morning. She cleaned the glass using bottled water with a tad of vinegar removing the fingerprints from it with a microfibre cloth.

The mirror was old but the glass was surprisingly in good condition with only a few spots usually seen in antiques. She looked into the glass discovering a deep shadow as if the glass was ebonised and she tilted it towards the light trying to make the shadow disappear but it only got darker, absorbing all light around it like a black hole devouring stars.



Lyra still had to deal with the boxes in the sitting room so she opted for tackling one at a time, unpacking them at her leisure starting with the box of books in the study. She found her wedding album in the box and took it out to the rubbish bin, having no qualms about erasing the past and started by denying any memory of it.

One of the bookcases had a locked cupboard at the bottom so she retrieved the spare key ring from the drawer of the utility room, trying each one that looked likely enough to fit it. When she finally got it open she was astounded to find the family's skeletons revealed, upon examination of a row of old books on metaphysics and the occult, and she shouted out loud half expecting his ghost could hear her, "Why Granddad, you old devil!"

Her life was surely taking a strange turn as she found herself led from one aberrant string of events to another, incredulously forced into the world of the paranormal, and now speculating about what else her grandfather might have been dabbling in while he was still alive. Perhaps she should go to the attic and do some snooping in the chests and closets amongst her grandparents old belongings.

She laughed at the poor dear knowing now that he had a penchant for the arcane and wondered what scandalous revelations her relatives would expose after she was gone and thought maybe she should leave them some juicy fabrications to shock the daylights out of them while she's laughing in her grave.

While rummaging through the boxes in the sitting room, Lyra realised it was meaningless stuff she really didn't need or use. It was hardly worth the effort of integrating them in with the other household items so she clambered up the stairs to the attic to store the remaining stuff, doubting that she would ever find the need to retrieve anything in the future. She could not believe how much



materialistic junk she had accumulated throughout her life, all these 'things' were like a weight dragging her down, and here she was towing it around with her like a ball and chain, wondering whether she really needed all of this low vibrational, dense matter crap.

After hauling it to the attic she chided herself for being so daft, she should donate what would be useful to others and then tossed the rest to free herself from this unwanted mass. What was even more absurd is that she had paid quite a bit to have removers transport all of these useless 'things' from London, only to have absolutely no place to put them other than the attic, rubbish bin or a charity yard sale. How thick can one get?

It made her wonder about too much attachment to the petty accoutrements of this world. Was life so empty that she had to fulfil it with amassing a material hoard like a greedy dragon guarding his treasures? Moreover, here she was buying even more stuff adding the crystal statue, the painting and that strange mirror to the pile, although at least they did find a place on the walls and shelf instead of being stored as otiose bits and bobs in the attic.

Lyra made tea and relaxed. Still marginally full from a late lunch at the restaurant, she just ate some tabbouleh with Arabic bread while checking emails on the laptop as well as looking up phone numbers for charities to relieve her of the many trivial objects. Mind over matter indeed!

Is it a wave or a particle? Is the reality of matter just an illusion of the mind? She decided to detach from materialism, viewing the world around her like a hotel room, it may be a finely decorated suite or a cheap roadside dive. Either way, she thought of herself as just a visitor on earth using rooms while she was here



without attaching any importance to it, thereby making it easier to let go of it and walk away.

She was just a traveller on a journey, trapped in a prison of this earthly plane and drawn to all the petty little things in a holographic illusion. These things around her were only theatre props, so each time she was tempted by materialism she will chant her motto like a mantra, 'Life is a Hotel Room.'

While sipping tea and meditating, she concluded that moving to Scotland had been the right decision. Lyra hungered for a change; she would learn to live at a slower pace absorbing the environment around her and planned to spend a lot of time in the garden. The groundskeeper could tend to the trimming and mowing but she wanted to care for some of the beds herself and fancied to have her own little plot for planting. Thus, adding another item to the chore list to have a word with the gardener.

It was getting late so Lyra got ready for bed and as she passed by the mirror, she thought she saw something move out of the corner of her eye. Sucking in breath, she turned around to look into the glass but she saw only her own haunted image surrounded by a deep shadow.

It was disturbing to think that she was seeing things, but then what reasonable explanation was there other than being all alone in an old house with a creepy mirror that she'd dreamt about and found coincidentally in a mysterious shop that had an even stranger owner who gave her the jitters.

She laughed it off then got into bed and saw the black book on the bedside table, so she adjusted the pillows, picked up '*Nuances Éternelles de Nuit*' and read part of the diary.



Lyra wiped the tears from her eyes; reading about the languished soul who wrote those words caused her a deep empathy. His pain, she could feel his pain as though he was bleeding through his very words, dripping down the pages. Lyra got up feeling depressed and headed for the kitchen to make some camomile tea to help her sleep.

As she passed by the antique mirror, she was spooked at the sudden image of a hand reaching out from the dark glass towards her, touching it from the other side as if trying to caress her cheek in the reflexion, she was startled, taking a step back and the illusion faded. She cried even harder as her emotions whirled into a maelstrom of sadness and despair.

She sat in the kitchen for a while having her tea then went into the study to see if her granddad's secret books had anything about ghosts in them. It was so late already and she did not really feel like reading an entire book, so instead rapidly skimmed through each one to get the gist of what kind of information resided within those pages.

Apparently, from what she gathered, the paranormal genuinely existed for these people and they defended it emphatically providing accounts of manifestations and insights regarding the astral plane. She thought about angels and demons, did they really exist as well? Her mind recounted a myriad of reflexions and she wondered what other mysteries she would discover about the spiritual world.

Disturbing influences from the beyond were definitely contacting Lyra and she knew there had to be more than this dull life on earth. Maybe the world was just a projection, like moving images on a screen, just the shadow of the real, an obverse reflexion of the light, and we're all barking mad living the same delusion!

She went back upstairs to the bedroom and looked into the old mirror, staring at her image and asked of it, "Who are you?"



She went back into bed closing off her senses while trying to calm the thoughts spinning around in her mind, which took on forms of gnarled trees with twisted vines and roots that burrowed in earth's abysmal shrine. Through Gaia's cavernous depths did she wander, and then in the Acheronian darkness she fell into slumber and dreamed.

She climbed a ladder with seven golden stairs towards a bewitching antique mirror, and was awestricken by a splendiferous being who motioned her forward. She went closer to the mirror but the great guardian was moving away, then turned and gestured to her again before fading into the darkness.

She reached her hand out to the mirror, still not seeing her image but only a dark shadow. There was no solid glass, her hand touching nothing as she propelled through the gilded frame and floated ecstatically into the black mists without fear.

A cube of space surrounded her in total pitch and at its centre was absolute timelessness, she did not look back at the past nor did she look forward to the future but instead, rested in the womb of eternity where aspirations are born. Every traveller here is an artist, this cubical kingdom his canvas to create his thought forms into matter painting his future, his masterpiece, and the delusion of matter being just the product of the gaoled mind.

Her consciousness extended into the beyond losing all form, all sensation, all self, in an endless sea of possibilities until her perception awoke and she knew she was not alone, but something or someone was connecting with her, commixing with her spirit and dreaming with her in her dreams. The air was vibrating all around her as tones of sine wave frequencies hummed in her ears.

Lyra passed through a veil into a twin dimension where she beheld a gold framed mirror that reflected a brilliant light and before the mirror, she saw her shadow self. A man stood looking into a small black looking glass with a silver frame which reflected a



brilliant light like a quasar exploding throughout the blackest of skies.

She realised that as she stared into a mirror of shadows, this being stared back at her into a mirror of light, while they dreamed parallel dreams like the two faces of Janus, looking through doorways, she looking at him in the past and he looking at her in the future. Her mirror showing shadows, his black mirror showing light.

When she looked upon the other half of herself, she felt an affinity with him and knew she had seen him somewhere before. He was a handsome man having a tender but tragic smile, with dark brown hair and the amber eyes of a wolf. He appeared to be in his forties and wore a black jodhpuri jacket with embroidered trim. They stared at each other in recognition, twin souls with their future yet unborn.

It took great effort for him to move in the strange kingdom they were in, everything was in slow motion as though time had stopped and all movement was frozen in a state unchanging and eternal, but he laboured to extend his hand to her. Knowing his intention, she also stretch hers forth impulsively to unite with a single touch, yearning to weave the threads of possibility for the reality of entwinement by their combined desire, energies of polar opposites wishing for fusion like birthing stars.

Slowly their hands moved to meet, forcing their wills in anticipation of such promise, but before that delicious touch could transpire, they were pulled back with a force that separated them. She did not hear him speak but his lips mouthed the word with anguish on his contorted face, "No!" he had screamed, and then again, "Noooooooo!"

The ground they had gained towards one another was lost and Lyra began falling as if hurled through empty space, and just before she had hit bottom, she was upright walking barefoot upon cold wet moss beneath a starry gallery, wandering east in the night, until all illusion and sinusoidal sounds faded into the light of day.





The Obsidian Sphinx

CIRCA 1900'S

I alighted the steps of the Royal Opera House into a moderate summer night's breeze and being restless, told my driver that I preferred to stroll giving him instructions to meet me outside the Savoy Hotel after an hour or so, and then I walked aimlessly down the streets with no destination in mind.

I was forty-two and still a bachelor, finding no fulfilment in the seemingly endless teas, the same gentry at the club declaiming the same arguments over opposing politics, country shoots and countless balls that society had to offer. Being an eligible bachelor with a small fortune made me vulnerable to the machinations of other men's meddlesome wives who made it their own personal crusade to see that I was satisfactorily settled to some daughter of one friend or another.

I was beset by tiresome females whose only pursuit in life was to marry, thus arranging more tiresome teas and social engagements for me to attend. I baulked at the thought of them planning my life and treating me like a lapdog carried around from one function to another all the while expecting me to engage in stultiloquy with insincere people.



Tonight was the last straw, having yet another senseless débutante foisted upon me with nothing more to discuss other than pointless gossip that mainly entailed her self-righteous criticism of her peers and the latest fashions, while Mrs Manadersal made all too blatant statements of how lovely she would look in this season's bridal attire. It was a harrowing experience to endure. I needed a *bas bleu* who could speak eloquently and discuss my interests, share my dreams and know my soul, not some mindless ninny whose greatest attribute is her embroidery.

It was this final onerous encounter that I averred to remove myself from the pomposity of polite society rather than suffer through anymore of their rather impolite schemes. I felt like *faire le diable à quatre* as half of my mind would argue against the casuistry of the other half trying to convince myself I was in the right, thus justifying any decisions and subsequent actions.

I grew bolder and more self-assured refusing to be deterred from my indefatigable desire to leave London and decorum be hanged! I would have my servants refuse all callers, give no forwarding address and rudely leave all correspondences unanswered. I smiled to myself embracing this new rash behaviour with relish. *Alea iacta est.*¹

I passed Drury Lane and walked down Great Queen Street when I noticed an eerie dim light emitting from a storefront window down a narrow back street. I approached the black brick building inquisitively to have look inside the window wondering if they conducted business so late at night. A black sign with white letters hung from worked iron that read '*Lasyrith Lubat Kayn, Oddities Shoppe*'. I surveyed the items in the display window where a multitude of foreign objects competed for space, most of which were stacked upon one another haphazardly.

¹ The die has been cast.



My gaze attracted to an obsidian sphinx statue shinning like black glass and I became startled when large hands with long fingers picked up the sphinx holding it out to me as an offering.

I looked up to see the owner of those hands, but he was so tall only his midsection was visible through the window. I tried the brass knob on the black door and finding it unlocked I stepped inside. The room was dimly lit by sconces on the walls that gave off dull olive and yellow rays obscuring the store with an oily vapour. Through the endless mass of furnishings, I noticed two doors on the back wall, a black door at the left-hand side and a white door was on the right.

The man who stood in front of me was of prepossessing appearance and considerable height. I was humbled not just by his enormity, but by his mien. He was completely bald and his eyes were pale chalcedonic blue, and attired in an all-black foreign costume one would see in the east.

He approached extending his arm to hand me the obsidian sphinx and said, "Welcome good sir, Lasyrith Lubat Kayn at your service. I see the statue appeals to you and of course, I knew instantly you were destined to have it. Please take it. I have much more to show you."

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance sir, I am Zaethian Salé," I replied, removing my hat and gloves holding out my hand for him to shake but instead he deposited the black statue in my grasp. He must have sensed my hesitancy because he put his hand on my shoulder in a reassuring gesture while guiding me forward through the shop towering over me with his honorificabilitudinitatibus.²

² The quality of deserving honour or respect; characterized by honour.



He was by no means pushing me with any force of his hand, but I felt he was guiding me by compulsion through the giant maze created from materialistic enticements of manmade excess as if he was trying to tempt me with all these worldly goods. The room was packed with a nimiety of antiques and I strolled through them impassively carrying the sphinx with detached interest as cold as the black stone.

There were suits of armour amongst the vast collection of items as well as tapestries, amphorae, rococo furniture, mantle clocks, a Phrygian statue of Pan and various items from the east including an elaborately carved wooden elephant from India.

We halted in front of the white door at the back wall of the shop and Lasyrith asked, "Is there nothing else your heart desires?"

I looked down at the black sphinx in my hand then gazed up into his silvery eyes that flashed black and soulless for a moment then turned to milky ice blue, and I felt as though he was studying me, reading the very depths of my soul.

I remained silent unable to answer, my life was devoid of something but I knew not what. I was unsatisfied and yearning to fill this emptiness, finding naught in this world to slake my need, nor was there any solace to be had in the company of the beau monde.

I merely shook my head in a negative indication and he pointed his fingers at the white door in invitation, "Please, open it of your own free will and accord."

Not knowing what lay beyond, I approached with much reservation opening the door slowly stepping inside a space of total pitch so dark I could not see in front of me.



“What the devil is this all about?” I asked more out of dread than curiosity.”

“You must let go of everything and just trust.”

I paused to consider the underlying meaning of his abstruse words, and with a slight pressure of his hand squeezing my shoulder I experience an instant relaxation as if from a narcotic effect.

The door closed behind us and with his hand still upon my shoulder, Lasyrith guided me through the dark chamber then pulled me gently to a halt and stood behind me with both his hands resting upon my shoulders. As I stared into the absolute blackness there appeared a sudden glow of light in front of me that now revealed what the darkness had hid, like a glimpsing the mystic sun shining at midnight.

*“Post mediam noctem visus, cum somnia vera,”*³ Lasyrith uttered in a mellisonant voice.

We were standing in front of a table, housing small black glass mirror on a stand having a round decorative silver frame approximately twenty-three centimetres, about the size of a dinner plate and strangely illumed from within. The light projected out seemingly from another dimension into the chamber, which now showed a faint ghost of my image in the black mirror surrounded by a halo of light.

I picked up the mirror tilting it in examination wondering if it had been crafted from obsidian and as I looked at Lasyrith’s reflexion in it, he no longer appeared in his black clothing but glimmered as though entirely enveloped in light. I had the impression that his former appearance was just a shadow of the persona that was now standing behind me.

³ “A vision after midnight when dreams are true.” - Horace



He stood bathed in a brightness so incomprehensible I was astounded with disbelief, “How can this be possible, what type of lamp illumines so, it is not like any electric light I have ever seen?” I asked as quiescence swept over me calming my anxious soul.

“This is merely a vision of the light of Heredom. For you this dark mirror may show the light of future. Does it not gladden your heart and ease your burdens?”

I knew that he had spoken the truth because from the moment I entered through the doorway and beheld the light, all the cares of the world ceased to exist and an impression struck me that all knowledge was just reflected light, seeing it with my shadow sight. I felt like I was in another dimension so far from this earthly plane that even thoughts of it could not reach my mind, as all of my attentions lay focused on the awe-inspiring light surrounding me.

“I feel at peace,” I said with effort. I did not want to speak, I just wanted to absorb the silence but Lasyrith continued, breaking the blissful spell.

“You live in the shadow world my friend. I only show you that which could be, to inspire you to sail your celestial ship across the night to receive the light of the blazing star. One must go through the Mystical Night in order to find truth.”

“Who are you really?” I asked eyeing him dubiously.

“Just a traveller who finds lost things and restores them,” Lasyrith said with a mischievous grin. “Please come with me.”

He led me away from the black mirror that radiated such wonderful light into the dingy storefront with its piled up earthly wares and I became dysthymic as I moved out of the light and back into the shadowy world knowing I had just seen a glimpse of what was missing in my life. It was light. I needed more light.



The illumination around Lasyrith had faded revealing his stark black clothing once again. I followed him to a counter at the centre of the shop that had an old curtain behind it where he entered for a moment then reappeared slinking through the curtain like a lithesome lynx holding a white card in his hand.

“I would like you to become acquainted with someone who can be most helpful to you, his information is on the back. You will find him there tomorrow night, please hand him my card and he will know that I have sent you.”

I took the card from him with a multitude of questions in my mind, but before I could ask a single one, he spoke interrupting my thoughts.

“You must simply trust.”

Lasyrith put his hands together with his fingers interlocking in front of him taking a meditative attitude almost signalling me that our business had been concluded and I had the impression that he was giving me a mental push to leave.

Amused and yet a little annoyed, I read the black script printed on the white card, *‘Lasyrith Lubat Kayn, Oddities Shoppe’* with an Egyptian ankh underneath, and on the back was the name and location for the gentleman he intended me to meet.

I reached into my jacket for my wallet to pay for the statue I was still holding, when he stopped me with a wave of his hand.

“If you please, I would like to purchase the curious mirror and this sphinx of course,” I said pulling out a stack of banknotes.

“I will wrap up the mirror and see that it is delivered to you, but please take the sphinx with you, I insist. You should keep the sphinx close by you each night. Just as you were destined to find your way here this evening, you will perchance discover your fate may be connected with the mirror, perhaps it will reveal the light in



its dark depths. There are no coincidences, only causality and the grand reality, *Sapientia Dei*.”⁴

I thanked him and gave him my card with my home address in Mayfair assuming that he intended to bill me on account. He escorted me to the front door, and I walked out into the night carrying my black sphinx trying to assimilate the peculiarity of that strange establishment and its proprietor.

As I walked back to my waiting carriage, I thought about the vision in the magick black mirror. I must have experienced a mystical encounter of some kind and no logical argument of my mind could negate it or deny it, I knew the validity of it to the very core of my being and I secretly wished to be holding the mirror right now rather than the statue.

When I arrived at the Savoy my driver had been fraught with worry that I had not arrived at the expected time, and being gone for such a period, was about to inform the constabulary thinking that I may have been assailed by a ruffian and lying somewhere unconscious. I looked at my pocket watch, it was three forty-five in the morning and I knew I could not have been away for so long since I had left the opera early, excusing myself around ten o'clock feigning a matter of urgency so I would not have to socialise afterwards.

I could have sworn I had not been in the shopfront for that long, just past midnight at the latest, but I somehow lost time I could not account for. I compared watches with my driver's on the speculation that perhaps my watch had failed although our times were fairly matched so this could not have been the case.

⁴ Wisdom of God.



While riding in the carriage I examined the statue with my hands feeling the features of the cold stone, it was about the size of a biscuit tin and surprisingly heavy. I was wondering why I had been pressed upon to lug around this heavy object and why the merchant did not offer to deliver it with the mirror. I stared at it in the darkness and felt a sense of surrender while listening to hooves ring on cobbled stones in a rhythmic beat lulling me into trance-like state dissolving my beliefs about reality.

I arrived home nonplussed and exhausted falling asleep before the coming of dawn drifting into a dream not of day but of endless night, where dark stars born of heathen antiquity ruled the skies and mighty Saturn holding the sands of time sought to sway my earthly demise and as his black cube enclosed around me.

I petitioned the obsidian sphinx to reveal the answers to all her riddles and make me wise as I fell asleep and dreamed.

I felt myself floating through a gateway into a desert of black sand and celestial starlight shone like bejewelled angels upon on a giant obsidian sphinx that whispered the breath of life in a riddled tongue. I stared at its glassy black face seeing myself mirrored in its eyes and an eerie halo engulfed it, suddenly becoming a vehicle of light soaring like a great lion journeying on waves of the sun.

Before me was a great pyramid that was a vault of time, and entering inside the unlit chamber, robed figures appeared to me in the visible darkness and sounds of their invocation of some dark liturgy echoed all around. They chanted in a G-note that resonated from this realm below to the dimensions above and the waves of vibration harmonised beyond the veil, their intoned words becoming a seed manifesting into potentiality to bring their orisons into reality,



and I listened with morbid fascination realising I was attending my own funerary rites.

I was placed in a cubical stone like a tomb, sealed in the sarcophagus, the lid sliding above me and the sands of time began flowing backwards as I reviewed my life's memories of every word and deed. I continued to regress until I reached a central point where all thought ceased and there was only the silence of my soul resting in a collapsing star field radiating with dark energy from an opposite universe of negative matter devoid of light and devouring all time.

I began to panic experiencing a terror greater than any mortal fear imaginable, whatever horrific presence was in this abode, it did not want me here and I cried out from the depths of my spirit to be freed from this abominable astral prison. Then to my fortunate relief I saw a pyramid radiating with bluish-white light, flashing like streaks of lightning across my cell of eternal darkness and I was swept away into a place of bright light, my hands now holding pentagons of power.

I awoke to a blinding light. The afternoon sun was piercing through my window in a hot blaze that hurt my eyes. I must have forgotten to close the curtains before retiring. I had slept through most of the day but I still possessed a lack of vitality, feeling disconnected from the present due to the bizarre visit to that uncommon shop, and the overwhelming experience of my dream. I remained aloof until evening wondering what other occurrences I would be subjected to.

I went downstairs to the library and saw the card next to the obsidian sphinx that I had deposited on the desk. I picked up the card flipping it over to read the backside.



Count Aristos Argotscoli

Loagaeth Club

47 Euclid Square

10.00 PM



I arrived at the club at the precise time where I was escorted immediately to a private drawing room and announced to Count Aristos Argotscoli. He gave me an enthusiastic welcome and after presenting Lasyrith's card to him, he acted as though he had been expecting me from the conversation that followed.

Count Argotscoli had a striking appearance being fashionably dressed in finely tailored clothes, he had a high forehead with receding hairline and wore his black hair slicked back with medium sideburns. His brown eyes were penetrating, looking over his pointed nose, and his dark prominent eyebrows gave him a sinister look though the impression fading when he smiled with full lips accented by a short black moustache. He stood at medium height when he rose to greet me.

He was an animated character, speaking rapidly while waving his arms about as if the gestures articulated his words, captivating me with his personal magnetism. Not once did he mention or discuss the strange trader Lasyrith Lubat Kayn, he evaded my endless questions, and instead made inquiries regarding the intimacies of my own life, which I now admit, I had been unable to refuse him any detail. I assumed he had used a form of mesmerism to compel me to expose such personal feelings that a gentleman would rarely express in confidence even to his closest of friends.



When he had extracted my confession of *fastidium vitae* ⁵ from me, he offered me sanctuary as his guest at his estate in Scotland and assured me it would be a haven for contemplation and growth. He explained he was going abroad for some time and felt it would be an essential cure for my malaise as long as I was not the nervous type that is easily disturbed by the unexplainable.

“Whatever do you mean by that?” I asked.

“*Necis quid serus vesper vehat,*” ⁶ Count Argotscoli said concealing his remark with the waving of his hand as if to ward off any further explanation.

I smiled at his *obscurum per obscuris* ⁷ supressing my laugh because I did not wish to offend him as he handed me his card with his address in Scotland. There was a triangle with symbols and letters printed on the back that one might associate with the magickal arts.

“I give you complete liberty of the place, please feel free to explore to your heart’s content and perhaps you will find something to fill your void. There are three paths to beauty my dear friend, and it is the angel of temperance that lies between the devil and death.

“I shall not be able to greet you for I am leaving post-haste, but will return to check up on you if I can. A small staff of servants will see to your comfort. I strongly suggest you set out at once before the bon ton inundates you with yet more social obligations.

“Be sure to take the express train and I will arrange for a coach-and-four to meet you at the station,” Count Argotscoli said with a mischievous smile.

⁵ Disgust of Life.

⁶ You know not what nightfall may bring.

⁷ To explain what was obscure by something more obscure.



I agreed to take advantage of his hospitable offer not quite knowing why; since he was a complete stranger, but nevertheless promised him I would leave London the day after tomorrow and thanked him for his generosity. My life was killing me and I knew I must escape this human jungle for my own survival, untangling my soul from the material universe around me to explore the invisible kingdom within. I needed sanctuary.

We said our farewells and I went home in an excited mood, eager to start on my adventure after that curious encounter with the persuasive count. Tomorrow I will pack, arrange for my departure and visit my bank to withdraw funds.

I left instructions for my staff to contact my solicitor for any urgent matter, as he is the only one who would know my whereabouts. By no means was I to be disturbed in Scotland and set upon by bothersome callers, so I did not share my confidence with the servants knowing they would be bullied, or possibly even threatened into releasing my address by the demanding and impertinent women of aristocracy wielding their titles and fortunes around like a weapon to get what they wanted.

I spent the night at a hotel in Edinburgh after a long uneventful day of travel, and I would take a short train ride in the morning where I was to be collected by carriage.

I arrived at the count's enormous estate the next day where I was cordially welcomed by his butler named Mathers who escorted me to my room to wash up before taking me on a tour to familiarise myself with the estate. I was surprised that Mathers was not Scottish. He was tall and thin with grey hair but was by no means old and feeble, having the bearing and exuding confidence of an old retainer.



The sprawling estate stood amongst rolling green lawns with a carriage house and stables off to the left side, and a greenhouse and several outbuildings round the back. Elegant terraced gardens graced the grounds, surrounded by manicured hedges with stone pathways in between. The demesne also included rose gardens, an herb garden and the cool green shadiness of panoptic druid groves in the distance.

“I hope you approve of the arrangements sir, if that room does not suit you I can have your luggage moved to another. I am the only one that occupies a room here. All of the other servants live in the dwellings past the gardens on the right. Should there be anything you require after hours, just ring and I shall attend you straightaway.”

“Thank you Mathers, I am sure the rooms you have selected for me will be adequate. I am curious however, with so many rambling suites and an entire wing off the kitchen, why do the other servants not stay in the house?”

“Ghosts, sir,” Mathers replied matter-of-factly, as if it was a common occurrence like an infestation of rodents.

“Ghosts? You are joking are you not?” I asked in disbelief.

“No sir, this estate used to belong to an old alchemist who dabbled in unnatural things. It is rumoured that he let something out and did not put it back, some demonic spirit or another, and when he himself had died, he too haunts the place as sort of a guardian against the entity he supposedly let loose. Only the master and I stay in the house at night and he is oblivious to the disturbances.

“Perhaps you will find more about it in the library sir. Which reminds me, where would you like your tea served, in the dining room or outdoors on the terrace?”



“Actually, I am accustomed to taking tea and in the library, thank you Mathers.”

“As is the custom of the count, will there be anything else sir?”

“No thank you.”

“Very well sir. I hope you will enjoy your stay here.”

Mathers departed and I walked back into the house from the garden terrace to the library with the intention of exploring its contents for any information I could find regarding the alchemist Mathers had mentioned. I was quite intrigued by the story and it presented me with a quest to focus my attention, so I set out to investigate the contents of the library with childish excitement hoping to discover its secrets.

I sat at the small refreshment table and helped myself to the silver tray laden with tea, cakes and sandwiches. I then proceeded to peruse the extensive collection of books housed on shelves lining every wall in rich wood panelling until the sun began to fade, bathing the room in a rosy hue. The library had two large reading tables, a settee with a grouping of comfortable leather chairs on a Persian carpet in front of the fireplace. Various items were displayed around the room including a globe, a suit of armour, silver tipped drinking horns on stands, statues and a large tapestry depicting a hunt.

I had found nothing of particular interest so far but I did enjoy taking in a few lines of prose here and there from forgotten books I had once read long ago. I crossed the room to continue my search and noticing that next to the end bookcase was a large wooden pedestal displaying a marble statue of Dionysus ceremoniously raising his cup, and behind the statue was a floor to ceiling plaid curtain in black, red, yellow and green.



I assumed the curtain was covering a window and went to open it to allow the last of the day's light in, hoping to watch the sunset. When I pulled back the curtain however, there was a heavy black wood door behind it with an equilateral metal cross affixed to it in the centre. A sense of thrill seized me at finding the hidden door but then I had a moment of rebuke, feeling as though I might be intruding on the man's privacy, but after reconsideration, the count did say I had free run of the estate. Promptly falling victim to my curiosity and without further guilt, I opened the door.

I stepped into a space of utter darkness and it was impossible to see anything so I went back to the library and rang for Mathers to procure a source of light for me as well as seeking assurance that it was permissible to enter the count's dark secret abode.

Mathers entered the room so quietly I failed to hear his sedate footsteps behind me and was so galvanised when he spoke, that I dropped the book I was reading in a loud slam as it fell on the table.

"I beg your pardon sir; I did not mean to startle you. How can I serve you sir?"

"I seemed to have stumbled upon another room," I said, pointing to the open doorway with the curtain tied back.

"Ah, I see you have discovered the count's hideaway, he often refers to it as his Shadow Library, left by the previous owner, the mad alchemist. I am afraid there is no lighting in there as of yet sir. I expect you shall want light to read by, please allow me."

Mathers retrieved an oil lamp and a large brass candelabrum from a cabinet under one of the shelves, and after filling it with new candles, lit both of them and entered into the dark room beyond while I waited patiently in the main library for Mathers to illuminate the room.



He reappeared and said, "There is a large window in the room you discovered that has adequate light to read by during the day, I will draw the curtains for you in the morning. We serve The Devil's Banquet here in the evenings. Dinner will be in the dining room at eight, the count insists on vegetarianism for the evening meal, but if you prefer something heartier or wish to dine at a later time I will advise the cook."

"There is no need, please tell cook I require only light meals in the evenings and a tray may be left in the library for all of the meals."

"The cook will be most appreciative to hear that you are so easily accommodated and accepting, but if you wish for something special please do not hesitate to ask, as she cooks to please."

"Thank you Mathers, that will be all," I said dismissing him rather hastily in my eagerness to reconnoitre the count's secret Shadow Library.

I gasped in expressive astonishment as I entered the fantastic room with all black furniture. The floor was chequered with black and white marble tiles resembling a chessboard. There were two black settees accented with deep burgundy and gold jacquard pillows grouped around a hearth that Mathers also lit. A set of black leather reading chairs with black tables next to them were arranged between the settees, one of the tables having a stuffed owl surrounded by a glass dome whose nameplate read Minerva. Two pillars were fashioned on each side of the black marble fireplace mantel.

A painting of a small abode in a country landscape with a mountain in the backdrop hung above the fireplace, it appeared plain enough yet I was strangely attracted to it as though I had been there before, and it was haunting me with an untraceable echo of a memory that I could not recall. The shadows in the painting



seemed to move, but perhaps it was just the flickering of the candlelight.

I let my eyes feast upon every detail of Count Aristos Argotscoli's Shadow Library. It was decorated with black and grey damask patterned wallpaper, and five enormous black bookcases stood along the walls, one opposite the hearth, two on the right wall, and the other two on the left, one on each side of the window now hidden by thick burgundy velvet curtains.

The shelves were full of old books and one entire bookcase was devoted to obscure items such as a human skull, a number of jars filled with herbs, a microscope, an ancient dagger, alchemist alembics, a black octopus and other biological specimens preserved in glass containers filled with yellow liquid. There were also taxidermy of exotic species including a giant bat and a cobra with beguiling eyes.

Between the two bookcases, a small black wood French château table with a black marble top veined in contrasting white streaks stood against the right wall. Affixed above it was a black framed mirror embellished with carved acanthus leaves and swags supporting concave black glass that might be have been used for scrying.

A brass plaque was attached to the bottom of the mirror engraved with words in a handsome script that read '*Nunquam Dormio*'⁸ and the lamplight shone into the shadow mirror showing a wraithlike image causing me to recoil at the sight of my own dark reflexion smiling grimly like a soul in perdition. Just then I was reminded of the mirror that I had found in the outlandish oddities shop, I had forgotten all about it.

⁸ Never Sleep.



The centre of the room displayed a massive black desk looking more like a giant coffin, there were also a couple reading tables having menacing griffins carved into its black wooden legs, one of which venerated a stone statue of a Sumerian goddess amongst an assortment of objets occultes and tools of divination. Her prominence was accentuated like a shrine with the multitude of offerings at her feet.

The other table had stacks of old leather bound books, held the lit brass candelabra Mathers had brought into the room, writing paper, ink bottles, fountain pens, a magnifying glass, a crocodile skull, a rack of smoking pipes and a bronze statue of Perseus holding Medusa's head.

On the left side of the room was a spiral staircase leading to a loft above. Mathers must have lit the dormer since warm light was shining down onto the winding stairs as if in invitation.

I climbed the spiral stairs towards the light. The room was furnished in rich Oriental carpets in black and gold, a small black desk, a few bookcases, black reading chairs and a black velvet chaise lounge. A telescope on a tripod stood in front of a small window and I wondered what joy could be found in the light of the stars.

I examined the bookcases, extinguished the lamps from the window and table then headed back downstairs to search amongst the oddments in the shadow room. There were many occult books on séances, mesmerism, theurgy, necromancy, philosophy, ancient religions, magick and the hermetic arts of alchemy and the Kabbalah. I selected several books and sat at the count's black desk then delved into the material well late into the night. Hidden within the pages of one of the books was a piece of sketch paper having a rather gruesome looking drawing of a devil with an



adjoining reversed image of an angel that had the Hebrew letters Shin, Tet and Nun (shTN) and the numbers, 359 written upon it.

Having ignored my dinner earlier, I now had an appetite and sat down to eat in the main library.

I had just finished my cold repast when I heard the sound of a faint haunting cello sombrely playing *Bach's Suite No. 5 Sarabande*. I crept out into the dimly lit hallway listening intently, ascertaining that the faint melody was coming from another part of the house and went to investigate the source of the music.

As I entered a large drawing room, the music abruptly halted and I felt a chill around me like a cold fog, wondering what threat would come out of the silent deep. All of the lights had gone out in the house as if the interference was due to some current of energy. I felt my way along the walls back to the library cupboard that Mathers had used and retrieving a small candelabrum. Upon lighting it, the sombre cello music began again but now with *Bach's Suite No. 3 Sarabande*.

I went back to the drawing room and the music stopped as I entered, holding out the flames into the uncharted darkness within. I felt a presence in the room that was soundless to my ears, void to my touch and invisible to my eyes but nonetheless, someone or something was here hiding in the shadows. I rotated the light surveying the environment, I saw a cello lying on the floor and its bow haphazardly left in the middle of the room as if thrown on the rug in vexation.

All was eerily still and I was trying to find something legitimate to account for this strange phenomenon, when I heard the sound of footsteps in the hallway, hard-soled shoes tapping on marble. I ran out to catch the intruder but there was no one about. As I stood there, the footsteps started again, the sound of them so close,



seeming to walk right by me and I felt a cold breath on my cheek like the kiss of death.

When Mathers first mentioned ghosts, I had my nagging doubts and it took much restraint not to have laughed in his face, but I now know he was right. Just as I had this thought, accepting of the paranormal, I heard noises in the library and I ran to discover what other tricks this entity sought to entertain me with this night. I could find no disturbance in the main library but when I entered the Shadow Library, I nearly dropped the candlestick and screamed out, "By Jove!"

I hurriedly set the candelabra down on one of the tables to examine the spectacle of horror in front of me; books were stacked in six-foot vertical towers all over the room, five towers in all. I wondered what demoniacal influences the old alchemist had raised from dark unbalanced places and if they meant to torment me. Having just a vague idea of how the count's Shadow Library was organised from my earlier examination, I began to shelve them accordingly as best I could.

By now, all the candles had burnt down and the oil lamp was getting low. I had almost completed my task on the last pile of books, when the landscape painting above the fireplace fell down in a peculiar manner as if deliberately knocked down. I walked over to the painting and noticed the wooden backing had come off. As I lifted the framed canvas an old black leather book fell out of the cavity from the back of the frame. Retrieving the discarded book from the floor, I opened it with curiosity and leafed through its pages, noticing its strangeness.

It appeared to be a grimoire and I sat at the desk and started to read the black leather book entitled '*The Satoricon*'.





CIRCA 1900'S

The old manor of Count Aristos Argotscoli was eerily silent as Zaethian Laurent Salé began reading the worn black leather bound grimoire, *'The Satoricon'*, by the fading oil lamp. The ancient discoloured pages contained images of what he thought was diabolism or necromancy. He found the drawings disturbing; depicting the means for opening portals by a conjurer using the dark arts. Just when he was about to close the book, dismissing it as nonsense, the oil lamp flickered out leaving him in the count's Shadow Library in utter darkness.

Zaethian stood and felt around him blindly in the dark. There was a box of lucifers and candles in the cabinet of the main library and as he moved cautiously feeling for any furniture in his path, he heard breathing and felt an icy vapour around him, chilling him with intense fear as his nerves tingled with excitement, raising the hairs on the back of his neck.

He felt the door frame and moved through it into the main library; he had not taken but three steps when the door slammed behind him causing his heart to jolt out of his chest as a light came towards him from the hallway.



The butler, Mather's approached from the hallway holding an oil lantern; upon hearing a disturbance of the slamming door he entered the library.

"Are you quite alright sir?" Mathers inquired with genuine concern, knowing well enough that the manor was haunted and he was accustomed to consoling terrified guests of Count Argotscoli.

"Yes, thank you Mathers, I just had a bit of a fright that's all. I think I am beginning to believe the story you told me about the mad alchemist that used to live here, as I have felt a strange presence in the room with me. I think I shall retire for the night if you could light the way."

"Very well, sir." Mathers turned and led Zaethian upstairs to his suite of rooms and after they reached the end of the wing he stopped at the door and asked. "I took the liberty of lighting the hearth in your room. It will help take the chill off the damp air. Perhaps you would care for a cup of camomile tea, a hot cocoa or a glass of sherry to help you sleep?"

"No thank you, I am fine." Zaethian insisted, but he really was far from fine, he was clearly rattled.

"It would be wise to keep your doors locked, this is a draughty old house, and one never knows if a gust of wind will blow through opening or slamming doors."

"I will take your advice Mathers, good night then," Zaethian entered the room and closed the door after the butler bid him good night in response.

He undressed and got into bed listening to the crackling embers of the fire as he drifting off into an uneasy sleep that turned into an eternal nightmare.



A sorcerer was surrounded in darkness. He conjured a ball of amber fire in the palm of his hand then sent the sphere floating in the air in front of him providing a faint glow to light his way. It was twenty-two steps down into the bowels of the castle, smelling of dampened rot, and the reek of death hung in the air like an entity, as if waiting to devour all living flesh. Down, down he went, descending the narrow flight of stairs leading to an underground crypt as the glass-like globe of fire floated in a bobbing motion before him.

The necromancer reached the bottom of the landing and stood at a door covered with patches of ebonised, black leather, which was no doubt human skin dyed with the blood of corpses taken from his victims, assuredly without their consent, adding some magickal essence to his dark craft.

There were shelves with skulls and bones, and tables lined the back wall of the room displaying jars filled with indescribable things, some of them dead, some of them not. A coffin was pushed up against the left wall as well as a cauldron of blood, and a furnace for souls.

He accessed yet another door on the right that lead to an underground tunnel ending in another chamber. To his horror he saw his magick circle had been broken it could no longer contain the disembodied spirits and nether beasts. They crept in through the weakened gate, breaching the portal and the magickian was unable to control the evil power that bled through into this realm. His delusion of power betrayed himself, the dark magick was too strong and there was no escape. Everything was not without a price. He was now one of the forsaken and cried out in terror, "They Hunt me!"



A faint tune resonated throughout the room when Zaethian awoke the following morning. He sat up startled by the noise and got up to investigate. A music box on the dressing table tinkled out a tinny melody, and as he approached the golden box decorated with a black enamelled swan, the tune abruptly stopped, sending an eerie chill down his spine as if in warning.

He lifted the lid of the music box discovering an old key inside, then closed it shut. He was about to turn around when he saw the old grimoire on the bureau giving him a bit of a shock. Either someone was playing a trick on him or the book was following him, that or ghosts. He shook his head in disbelief, washed up and dressed, then took the book with him downstairs in search of breakfast.

He returned the devilish tome back to the count's secret Shadow Library placing it on the behemoth black desk and opened the curtains to see the foggy grey light outside distorted by the bevelled leaded glass diamond windows. Examining the room, he saw nothing out of place except the landscape painting where he had discovered the hidden book, was now askew.

After finishing his meal, Zaethian put on his boots and topcoat then went out for a walk in the damp morning fog, strolling past the stables to the common path on the outskirts of Count Argotscoli's estate.

The surrounding fields were abuzz with insect noises as the morning sunshine struggled to penetrate the fog, Zaethian taking in deep breaths to clear his mind of the strange circumstances that befell him and his disconcerting nightmare. The smell of damp vegetation permeated the air as he continued down the lonely path not knowing where it was leading him.



While deep in his reverie, a huge grey Irish wolfhound came running down the dirt lane chasing a rabbit that ran off the path to take cover in the brush as the dog pursued, thus startling Zaethian to jump out of the way of the charging animal. The hound lost interest in the hare and instead sat barking at his new quarry. Zaethian stood stock still in a stare out with the beast until he saw an elderly gentleman in country tweeds yelling in a breathy voice, "Here now, what's all this? Herschel heel this instant!"

The hound immediately became submissive and waiting for his master, as the old man came up from the path with a laboured gait to tether him with a thick leather lead.

"I am terrible sorry sir for the annoyance; Herschel is quite gentle I assure you, I pray he didn't give you a fright. Allow me to introduce myself, I am Lord Alfred Tymesdale, but please all of my friends call me Gunther."

Zaethian shook the man's hand and responded in kind, "A pleasure to meet you sir, Zaethian Laurent Salé, I am just a visitor here staying at the house of Count Aristos Argotscoli as a guest while he is away."

"Oh, that spooky old place," the old man chuckled and slapped him on the shoulder in camaraderie. "I've heard some tall tales regarding the property if you would care to walk back with me and join me for tea?"

"I would be delighted sir," Zaethian replied with a smile, enjoying the good humour of this old fellow, his high spiritedness was far from the usual pompous and stuffy aristocracy he associated with in London, he was like a breath of fresh air.

The old man then escorted Zaethian to his neighbouring house some thirty minutes' walk down the common, making small talk along the way with Herschel in tow.



They approached the large country manor from a long gravel path lined with yew trees and upon reaching the entrance, the gardener in a heavy coat and gloves greeted them, taking the leather lead from Gunther's hand. "Good morning to you sirs, I will take Herschel round the back and get him cleaned up," Wynn stated as he trotted away with the wet and muddied wolfhound.

"Thank you Wynn." Lord Tymesdale entered the house and his manservant took his ulster and herringbone wool Ivy cap, then assisted Zaethian as well, hanging their items on the coatrack in the large foyer and taking away their boots to be cleaned.

After settling in the large parlour next to the hearth, a chubby woman with a cheerful disposition deposited a large tea tray filled with various cakes and sandwiches, and poured out their tea into porcelain cups decorated with a cheery floral pattern.

"Thank you Mrs Dorset," Gunther called after her as she swept swiftly out of the room as if having a boiling pot on the stove that needed attending.

Zaethian added several tea sandwiches and some seed cake to his plate and ate silently as they enjoyed the refreshments.

"Now Zaethian, you say you have just met Count Argotscoli and have not been in his acquaintance long?"

"Quite so, I have actually just met the man and he offered me to stay in Scotland on holiday to get away from the noisy city life of London. I admit it was all very sudden, and to tell you the truth, strange occurrences have beset me since arriving on his estate."

Zaethian felt an affinity with Gunther, and even though he was a guest of the count, he did not exactly feel loyal to him, especially after what he had experienced, so he went on to explain the strange and sinister events of the cello music, the lights going out, the



books being stacked in vertical towers in the count's secret occult library that the servant called his Shadow Library, and then the music box playing by itself just this morning. However he did not mention the black leather book he found, *'The Satoricon'*, he felt some things should remain undisclosed.

The old man's hazel eyes glowed with a warm trust and widened in excitement as though he hadn't the patience to reply with any questions and instead waved his hands like a nosey-parker of an old woman eager to share the local gossip.

Lowering his voice a few octaves, the old man's small frame leaned forward in the chair, what few white hairs he had left on his almost bald head stood up from when he removed his hat earlier and with his wrinkled face, it made him look like a mad scientist.

"There are stories amongst the gentry as well as the domestics that over a hundred years ago some foreigner from Eastern Europe purchased that manor, and ever since, there have been rumours of devilry and hauntings. The foreigner was an alchemist belonging to some underground society that dabbled in unnatural things, it is said that during one of his experiments he opened a hole in this reality and let something in, something dark and evil from another dimension. Whether it would be called hell or the spirit realm none can say, but it is surely some kind of entity not of this world." Gunther took a deep breath and leaned back as Mrs Dorset entered the room to attend them.

"Lisselle dear, this is Mr Salé who is staying at Count Argotscoli's estate, he has just had a few paranormal encounters, you must tell him what you've heard," Gunther coaxed.

"Oh dear me, not you too sir, I get the frights just thinking about it. From what I have been told by the count's former housekeeper, Millie Albright, she and the cook quit after enduring a



ghostly presence. Things were moving by themselves and they had this feeling that someone was next to them but when they looked about, no one was there.

“It was not until the count had opened up a hollow wall down in the cellar that they gave notice and left their employment. Millie says the cook nearly had heart failure when she had heard an unnatural scratching and whispers coming from the cellar. Mathers assured them it was only rats, but she claimed there was a feeling of evil, pure evil emanating from that cellar door and both of them had refused to stay with the household and gave their notice, even though Mathers said he would retrieve any supplies they needed himself. In fact, to this day he is the only one that ventures down there, the other servants won’t go near it. None of the new help will even stay in the house overnight, except for that Mathers fellow. He must have a right thick hide to put up with that kind of mischief.

“Excuse me but I’ve gotten a case of nerves just talking about it. Will you be wanting anything else?”

“That will be all, thank you Lisselle, sorry to put you through it but I feel our friend here had to know,” Gunther said apologetically.

Mrs Dorset filled their cups with tea, checked the pot and strode off anxiously, obviously spooked.

“Well,” Gunther continued conspiratorially, “It seems the count had found a skeleton in a hidden room that descended another floor down from the cellar. The room was some kind of secret laboratory and after that became known, some of the servants left outright, not wanting to be in a murder house or worse yet, the house of a necromancer.”



It was getting late and after polite conversation revolving around mundane topics, Zaethian got up to leave, donning his outerwear and boots and said farewell. Lord Tymesdale kindly offered to have the gardener, Wynn, drive him back in a hansom and he was soon deposited at the foreboding mansion of Count Argotscoli in a more depressed mood than when he had set out for his walk this morning.

Mathers greeted him with a nod and a raised eyebrow as he saw the carriage drive off, but only informed Zaethian that a package had been delivered for him by courier and that his supper will be served shortly. Zaethian thanked him and entered the library which had become his sanctuary, rarely using any of the other rooms. He saw the parcel on the table that apparently must have been forwarded by his solicitor since no one else knew where he was staying. He opened the brown paper and a white card fell out.

Lasyrith Lubat Kayn
Oddities Shoppe



He picked up the card and read it, then glanced at the black glass mirror he had purchased. He thought it was strange that the first card he'd received from the shopkeeper had a symbol of an



Egyptian ankh on it, which he was instructed to present to Count Argotscoli upon their introduction, now this card had the symbol of mercury. He wondered what the significance was.

He caressed the silver frame of the black glass mirror, gazing in its dark depths but saw nothing, not even his own reflexion. He shook his head, realising he was so enchanted by the vision he had seen in it at the old shop and now it appeared just a novelty, since he now knew the count had a similar scrying mirror in his Shadow Library.

The cook came in with his tray and he set the mirror down in disappointment and ate his food glumly, worried he had made a mistake in coming here. This was no place for a holiday, nothing like Florence, the Riviera, or Vienna. This was a place of darkness and it was oppressive, giving one an atmosphere of dread. Zaethian missed Gunther's positive and energetic personality already, feeling alone in this morose silence. Perhaps he should make preparations to leave soon, giving his excuses.

He took his mirror upstairs with him, placing it on the night table then refreshed himself. His mood was darkening and he wondered why Count Argotscoli would even suggest he come to such a foul and lonely place. He decided he would investigate the cellar and have another look at that old tome to see if he could find out more about the hauntings, then he could have an excuse to visit Gunther again and say goodbye before he left.

As he hung the towel up by the basin, the chiming tune of the music box was heard again, it had been stuck in his mind since this morning, *Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake Op 20*; the main theme haunting him as he watched the black swan spin in a circle atop the gold box. His hand was shaking as he lifted the lid and



snatched the old key. The music stopped with a click of the mechanism.

He went downstairs, Mathers was nowhere to be seen. He wanted to ask him where the cellar was located, but decided he would just explore, having the count's permission to have the run of the place. He started with the kitchen trying several doors that opened into pantries and a cleaning closet with buckets, brooms mops, brushes and soap. He went down a service hall, noticing a door on the right side, he lightly turned the handle and crept inside.

He thought this must be the cellar. It was dark so he took the oil lamp off the hook on the wall, lit it with the lucifers on the shelf next to it and held the lantern up, descending the steps into a vast cellar filled with shelves loaded with stores, barrels, and racks of wine. He surveyed the perimeter of the room, shining the light all round until he saw a large wooden medieval door with black iron hinges surrounded by a brick wall. It was locked. He deduced that the count must have added the door after breaking the wall down years ago.

He removed the key he had taken from the music box and tried it in the lock, turning the key with a dull click while the door hinges squeaked as it swung open. Instantly he felt a boding presence as he entered the black chamber, cautiously peering round as he made his way down the stone steps into the room below. There were several more lanterns as well as candelabrum which he now lit and after having a bit more light he gained the confidence to explore.

He remembered his nightmare and wondered if dreams manifest into reality.

There were shelves with old bottles of unidentifiable substances, various boxes, tools, alembics, dried plants that looked as if they would turn to dust at the slightest touch, and a cauldron



covered with cobwebs. At the end of the room was a black marble altar with candlesticks, a chalice, a strange ceremonial dagger adorned with a black snake, a wand of some sort, an empty bowl and a wooden lectern holding a book called *'The Qliphoth'*.

Zaethian moved closer to examine the book on the altar when he noticed a large circle painted on the floor that was riddled with strange symbols like a triangle of art. Residue of melted wax stuck to the floor as well as some dark stains in the middle of the ritual circle. He wondered if it was blood, and as he was entertaining that gruesome thought in his mind, the large wooden door at the top of the stairs slammed shut with a boom.

Immediately he panicked, running to the top only to find the door locked, he rattled the door knob seeing the key was not in the lock, it was gone. He held the lantern down and looked under the crack of the massive door; the key had not fallen on the floor. Someone or something had purposely shut him in here. He heard a deep throated laugh from downstairs in the necromancer's room. Slowly he walked back down to the sound of scratching. It was coming from the floorboards inside the circle.

Zaethian set the lantern down and using a pry bar he found under one of the tables, started tearing up the flooring, removing three long planks. Regret sank in as he beheld an elongated black box, like a coffin but unadorned, his heart now pounding fast as fear fuelled his adrenaline. Using the bar, he slowly lifted the lid to find bones, human bones, surrounded by an old black pot bound with chains and covered with yellowed leather that had magickal symbols embossed into it, was it human skin? Four black wax seals with fantastic sigils held the skin in place and he thought he saw small hairs protruding from it. He heard whispers coaxing him in a dark garbled tongue, the hissing soothing him, forcing him.

Unable to resist the lulling voices, Zaethian reached his hand towards the grotesque cauldron and broke one of the seals, the



dried wax crumbled easily as the hide lifted and a horrendous stench assailed him making him gag. Sickened by the shock, he hastily closed the coffin lid back over the kettle and skeletal remains, then reattached the floorboards with a can of nails and hammer he found on a nearby storage shelf.

As he finished the last plank, he was engulfed by a thick black mist. A strong smell of sulphur burned in his nostrils as he choked, coughing and gasping for clean air. The black cloud surrounded him, overwhelming him with raw fear as something was feeding from him, it fed off his fear, his energy and then his blood when he felt a sharp pain just below his neck, he screamed out in extreme agony, feeling nauseated in body, mind and soul. He continued to yell in despair, begging like a frightened child until the darkness passed over him and he fell unconscious upon the circle of black magick.

It must have been a few hours later when Zaethian opened his eyes, one lamp was still burning, the others had long exhausted their fuel. He rose slowly. He felt sick and his neck was throbbing. He realised he should have used the pry bar to beat the door down rather than let his curiosity get the better of him, but it was as though something was compelling him to open the black box. Retrieving the lamp and the pry bar, he went to the stairs and seeing that the door was now open, he discarded the tool. The key was in the lock. Had he imagined it? Locking the door and taking the key he stumbled into the cellar then went upstairs to his room. He threw himself on the bed exhausted, and slipped into fitful sleep with hellish dreams.

There were whispers in the dark filling his mind with horrific images; he was crying in despair, lost and forsaken, he had



become one with them, Legion. A host of daemons gathered round him draining his life essence, he felt possessed as the whispers continued inside his head. How many were there?

He was forced to drink some dark liquid with vile ingredients, as he heard the whispers recite:

*“Drink deeply of Hecate’s wine
As the black cobra rises to consume your soul
The abyss holds a light divine
The Daemons devour to make you whole
Or plague you with darkness if you despair
Balance is the key, laughter, love and light
Ascend from the pit of Lilith’s lair
Or remain in the Eternal Shades of Night”*

Zaethian cried out in anguish, he was wandering endlessly in a wasteland as the daemoniac voices tortured him. He stopped suddenly as he came upon an Obsidian Sphinx, black as midnight and emanating with dark energy, he felt it would consume his last spark of light as the black sphinx opened its mouth to swallow him in its dark embrace.

He heard laughter as he struggled to awaken, the sounds filled the room, and when he sat up he saw a magpie at his open window mocking him with its chortle. He squinted at the morning rays of sunlight piercing his eyes and went to wash, shave, then dress in a fresh set of clothes. Zaethian felt his neck, the throbbing pain was still there and he examined his throat in the mirror, one of those peculiar sigils was burned into his skin, much like a branding iron, a daemons bite, a mark from the shadowy abyss that



appeared as scrawled otherworldly writing with symbols. The flesh was still raw and it ached. He knew some entity had cursed him.

He could not believe his eyes, thinking his experience in the lower cellar must have been a hallucination and he questioned the nature of reality, ghosts, alchemists and daemons. He wondered whether it had all been a hoax created by Count Argotscoli who might be one of those charlatans conducting séances and mesmerism in some medium's parlour faking wailing apparitions from the beyond. Was the shadow world real or his life in London on this earthly plane? He supposed one must emerge from Plato's Cave to reveal the truth.

He put the old key back inside the black swan music box knowing he would never set foot in the necromancer's lair again or this creepy estate, and decided to make arrangements for his departure, having enough of this psychical phenomena. He picked up his black mirror off the floor, since it must have fallen last night, and as he shook his head at it, a flash of soft light appeared in the depths of the dark glass and continued to grow into a blue luminescent ball that held him spellbound, emotions of joy momentarily overwhelmed him and faded as quickly when the light extinguished, leaving the black void of the glass in its place.

At first, Zaethian was determined to interrogate the butler and openly accuse him of the abuse of his person, but touching the daemon's bite on his neck, deep down he knew it was something not of this earth that was haunting him, and wondered if Mathers was also afflicted by the entity's mark. He went downstairs to his usual place for breakfast and saw *'The Satoricon'* on the table, picking it up reluctantly as Mathers appeared with the serving tray.



“Mathers, I will be leaving today, if you can kindly arrange for transportation to the train station by midday I would appreciate it, I must hasten back to London, unfortunately I have urgent business to attend to. I thank you for service and will leave a letter to Count Argotscoli with my regards.”

“Very well sir, I will see to it at once. I had hoped the parcel you received yesterday had not brought ill tidings. May all your affairs work out for the best.” The old butler looked disheartened and dismissed himself, silently exiting the room in a sagging posture like a condemned man.

He finished his meal, poured another cup of coffee and opened *‘The Satoricon’*.





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I have found it. One of the portals is here in Prague. I used the sigils from the accursed book to open the gate, not knowing what daemonic entity I had released. Daemons lay in wait at the Devil's door for the summoning of black magick, waiting to ensoul. They are collectors of shells. Two other portals are known to me that may hold the key of liberation from this curse of darkness and self-destruction; one is in Istanbul and the other in France, near Rennes-Le-Château. It is the only hope left.

There are gates of darkness and gates of light.
Be wary what you open in the Abyss.

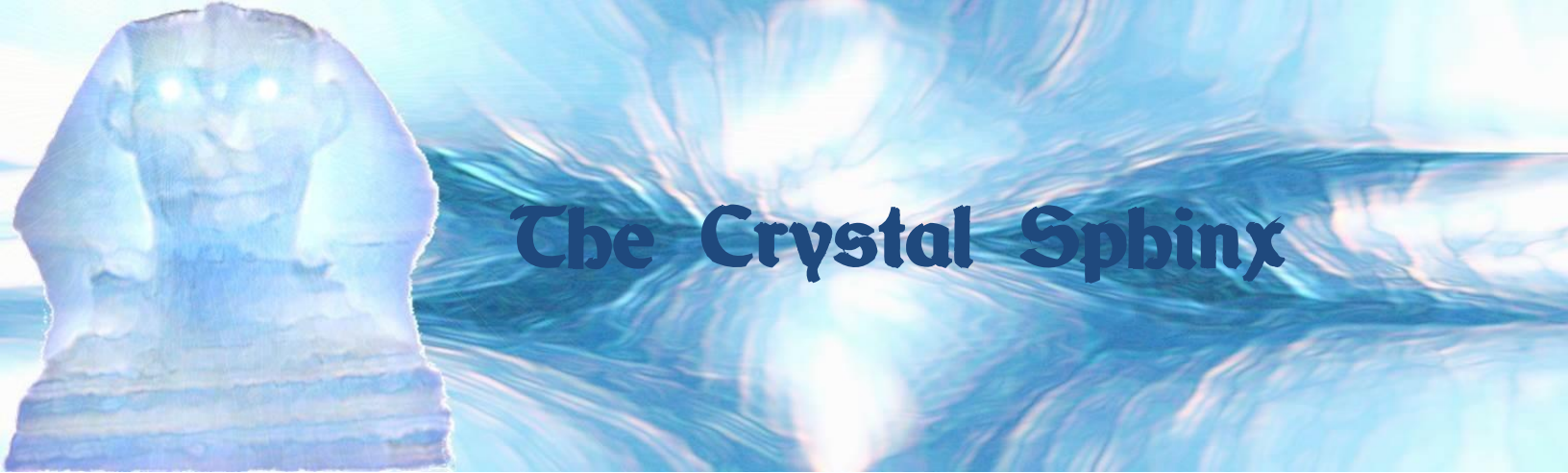
*Strigo Mancentu**Prague, 1777*

Zaethian sat on the train deep in thought and unconsciously touched the burn on his neck. He had left a rather curt thank you note to the elusive Count Argotscoli with the butler, and he was still deciding if he should write Lord Tymesdale when he got home. Gunther may think him mad if he related the story to him, but then again, he may need an ally who understood the circumstances that surrounded the old mansion.

He was relieved to be gone from that accursed place, though he was now focused on his own plight and made a decision to try to find the other gates mentioned in *'The Satoricon.'* Once he arrived in London, he would make an immediate departure to İstanbul, looking for answers was his only mission and he needed to remove this shroud of darkness that plagued him.

The sound of the train along the tracks droning out the chook-chook, chook-chook, calmed the dragons in his mind and thinking about his mirror of light, he fell asleep and dreamed.





The Crystal Sphinx

Lyra Swan awoke to another day of charcoal skies to see the face of a man in the haunted looking glass staring at her and wondered if he had been watching her sleeping. It was the man from her dreams, the man from the distant past, but he was not in Victorian dress like the first few dreams she had of him, he was now wearing foreign garb, the same jacket he had worn in her dream last night.

“Oh, my God!” She screamed, suddenly recalling the qualia with clarity. The dream had taken on a reality of its own from some other dimension. The spectre must have known that she was frightened because his image in the mirror faded then was replaced by her astonished face contorted by shadows that moved in the glass. She knew this must be Zaethian Laurent Salé who wrote the diary, *‘Nuances Éternelles de Nuit’*, and wondered what her connection was with this cursed man living in darkness, and plagued by demons.

She jumped as the phone rang, startling her out of her wits and looked at the caller ID; it was her friend Nevin calling from London. She hoped he’d leave a voice message because she was still in a state of shock and did not feel like engaging the quidnunc at the moment. She looked at the clock; it was 9.09 AM. She had not realised that she slept in for so long and went downstairs to



make coffee then showered, still obfuscated from the dream and enthralled by that alluring and ghostly watcher.

She rang up Gordon, the groundskeeper and told him exactly what needed to be done. At first, he thought she was joking because some plants may require winter care and she had to convince him that she was dead serious about her unconventional choices in foliage, so he was finally obliging. Gordon said he would ring the various nurseries first to see if the plants she wanted were in stock then pick them up while he sent his two lads over with the equipment on a trailer to turn the soil and start digging the holes. After they finished that project, he promised they would start the stonework for her little garden plot.

Lyra decided to go back to the oddities shop in Edinburgh and show the owner the old journal she found inside the painting. She also wanted to ask him if he had noticed anything extraordinary about the mirror, like seeing other entities in the glass! As she drove to town, she was rehearsing exactly how she was going to try to explain the strange phenomenon to Lasyrith Lubat Kayn with finesse, so he wouldn't think she was insane.

She didn't have the address programed into the car's GPS since she just happened upon it the first time, but luckily after driving around she found the same alley. When she stood before the shop she was in disbelief, the windows were boarded up with old wood and rusted nails that appeared to have been there for some time, there was no black sign, nor was there even bolt holes in the old stone where the wrought iron sign would have been secured to the building.

It was the same building and the same alleyway, she would swear to it, but '*Lasyrith Lubat Kayn, Oddities Shoppe*' was gone.



There was a space between the boards so she peeked inside through the window, it was completely empty and there was no trace that any shop had existed yesterday. Lyra also noted that there was no black door that would have led to the oddities room on the back wall of the shop, only a solid dingy wall that was plainly visible. She refused to believe she was mistaken and knew without a doubt that this was the same place.

She was absolutely flabbergasted and walked around the block to see if she could ask one of the other business owners if they knew where the antique store had relocated. How could the store close and disappear with the entire contents overnight?

She still hadn't paid for the items, nor did she give Lasyrith her phone number or address. She had been so anxious about finding the same mirror that haunted her dreams that she forgot to offer it. Now that she thought about it, what trader would refuse payment and insist a customer should take the items away with them on trial? It was just too suspicious. Honestly, what is going on here?

She went into a kilt shop off the main street. It was notably dim inside and even though the shop was small, they had a large inventory on their racks and the shelves were packed floor to ceiling. They had books with sample swatches of every clan pattern on a table at the entry, and the store displayed sporrans, dirks, cashmere sweaters, coats and flasks, you name it, if it was Scottish they stocked it.

An older man approached her wearing a white formal shirt and tie with an olive green, blue and red plaid kilt. He was short with thinning auburn and grey hair, and displayed a welcoming smile. Lyra asked him about the store '*Lasyrith Lubat Kayn, Oddities Shoppe*' down the back alley in the old stone building behind them. He kept calling her 'luv' and looked at her as though she was lost or mistaken and insisted that the old stone building had been vacant



for well over nine years now, and that she must be in the wrong neighbourhood, assuming she was a confused tourist.

She felt as though he was treating her like a child who saw a faerie and not one adult believed her, receiving admonishment instead for an overactive imagination. She walked out of the kilt store feeling discouraged and very perplexed.

Her mobile was ringing and looking at the display, saw that it was Nevin again, not really wanting to deal with his ostentatious personality right now; she sighed heavily walking back to the car and drove towards home, while stopping at the grocers along the way for viands. When arriving home, she saw a large flatbed lorry and Gordon was waving his arms at the other workers who were trying to get the large tree centred in the giant hole. Seeing him occupied at the moment, Lyra gave a casual nod so she would not disturb their work and went inside to make some Jasmine tea.

She retrieved her messages and listened to Nevin's tirade. He was desperately trying to reach her to say that he and his significant other, Rodney, were both coming to Edinburgh on the train tonight and wanted to visit over lunch the next day while they were in the area. Nevin insisting they drive over in a hire car and see the place instead of Lyra just meeting them in the town centre for lunch. Bloody nosey-parkers!

It was pointless to argue with Nevin because he loved contention. It fed his ever-increasing need to complain or criticise and the more he talked, the more energy and pleasure he derived from hearing the sound of his own voice, it was getting him to shut up that was the real victory. Lyra knew without a doubt that they were really just stopping by to conduct a little espionage so they would have something to talk about back in the workplace, because



if your back was turned, then you just happened to be the topic of discussion, and if you were not around to defend yourself, the wilder the exaggerations became.

Just great! Here she thought she had escaped the office after resigning and now the office was coming to her. She would have to listen to all the disparaging gossip from Nevin who still worked at her old company, whether she wanted to or not. She no longer cared for trivial nonsense and had other things to deal with right now. Lyra needed a psychic or an exorcist to address the paranormal problem, not a couple of harping dandies.

She resigned herself to be patient and graciously tolerate the encounter, however, to avoid immediate conversation she left a message at his home rather than ring his mobile or office number, formally stating on the voicemail that she would expect them tomorrow. That way she could at least have time to brace herself for the onslaught of their overwhelming personalities. Nevin had the address, and she was sure he had already had it mapped out from the internet and didn't need her to give directions.

There was a knock at the door and Gordon stood on the back porch boasting a wide smile, "I thought you might like to have a look at your new endeavour, and I'll have to admit it turned out looking better than I had imagined." He seemed quite pleased with his accomplishment and motioned with his arms, anxious for her to follow.

They went to the back garden to view the impressive sight. In the northeast corner stood a very tall acacia tree surrounded by freshly planted hedges and various shrubs. The different proportions assimilated into an artistic arrangement. The acacia tree was beautiful, majestic.

"Behold your *Arbor vitae*!" Gordon said triumphantly.



“It’s magnificent! Thank you my dear friend, you truly are a master.”

“I’m glad you approve Lyra, because I’m a mite proud of that tree, look at the symmetry, I chose the best one I could find, and this tree has perfect balance. We’ll start on your garden plot for your herbs and flowers first thing in the morning, so don’t mind us if we’re here early. Have a good evening,” he said and went on his way.

Lyra felt like an impulsive child longing to climb to the top of the tree, branch by branch, and as a little girl she thought how grand it would be to have a tree house in the sky, her own private *sanctum sanctorum*, but her father said it wouldn’t be ladylike.

She could not resist walking round the newly planted tree and knelt down patting the soil at its foundation with a communion-like reverence, then caressed the bark of its trunk as if knowing that it held the answer for solving a great mystery.

She was seeking eternal truth within the depths of her consciousness and she questioned whether it was just matter in motion like Descartes’ mechanistic clockwork universe that was the key to understanding, or merely changing her belief from duality to unity?

Lyra went back inside to wash up and make something to eat. Her mind was so full of abstractions that she had callouses on her brain from thinking too hard. She was still freaking out over the disappearing oddities shop and was trying to contemplate the implausible occurrence. It was all so unreal.

She went upstairs to take a relaxing shower and inadvertently glanced at the mirror seeing her austere image reflecting back at



her. She had not worn makeup since moving to Scotland. Forget vanity, it got her nowhere and gave her a feeling of falseness masquerading as somebody else. She preferred clean skin anyway, it seems more real, so she removed her painted mask to expose the raw Lyra to the world, accept her or reject her, the choice was theirs. Aren't we all just reflexions of each other, masks and mirrors?

As she continued to stare in the looking glass, black mist swirled suddenly like smoke and the image of a man appeared with a smile on his face, he was captivating and she acknowledged his smile with one of her own. She put her hand to the glass to touch his face, closing his eyes as if he was imagining the feel of it. She moved her hand over the image of his sable hair hoping it was real and not just the ghost of her imagination. He seemed to sense her thoughts like a theurgist with psychic powers, because he opened his eyes trying to communicate through them silently without uttering a syllable.

She trembled while meeting his golden eyes in silence and caught her breath as her lip quivered with unuttered words. His eyes shone like immortal poems that spoke sonnets to her soul and she knew he was no stranger, only the reflexion of their shared divinity.

While staring face to face there was an alluring magick in his gaze and he frowned as his image began to fade, losing substance he melted into the shadows leaving her with a feeling of emptiness, as if she lost a part of herself and her soul in another dimension of time. She felt fragmented and grieved for the loss of his visage.

Lyra was attracted and repulsed by some magnetic force that drew her with yearning, but was also tempered by the horror and scepticism of otherworldly manifestations. Opposite energies pulling her forward then repelling her in a struggle for dominance in a never-ending war. How could she believe in the fantastic? The



dreams of an antique shop that manifests and then disappears, along with an eerie landscape painting and a haunted mirror. People would think she was mad if she told them.

Early the next morning Lyra heard the gardeners working round the back and she decided to start cleaning the house for Nevin's inspection and inevitable criticism. Rodney on the other hand, had a positive personality and was more gracious in doling out praise rather than carping, but she braced herself to be ripped to shreds nonetheless.

The doorbell rang a little after ten and she heard the pair of them yell out, "We're here," sounding like a couple of poltergeists as Lyra greeted them with hugs and European kisses all round, showing them into the sitting room.

"My, this is a stuffy old place, looks like my Grandma's cottage," Nevin barked out his first cut, the second was quick in coming when he continued by twisting the knife, adding, "And you, look at you, dressed so frumpy and with no makeup, are you changing your style to match the old matron surroundings?" Nevin cackled and then snorted at his own cleverness.

"I'll have you know, that this was my Grandma's old place, hence the dated mode, and I happen to like it this way, I think it's rather cosy," Lyra snapped in self-defence.

Rodney interrupted playing referee, "Now girls, play nice, and Nevin, you behave."

They sat conversing over a pot of tea and it was then that Lyra pointed out the recently acquired oil painting.

Rodney examined it like an art critic, moving his head around as if it would give him a different perspective, and then pronounced,



“It really doesn’t do anything for me, seems drab and ordinary. Just a boring landscape, they could have at least added a goat in the picture.”

“What cheap bazaar did you get this from dear, or did you buy it in a shopping centre car park by some git selling it out of their boot. It looks like it was done from one of those paint-by-numbers kit if you asked me,” Nevin said flamboyantly waving his hand in the air as if to accentuate his opinion.

Rodney turned his head to politely conceal his laughter, hoping Lyra wasn’t too offended at their rebuke of her vulgar tastes in arte.

She rolled her eyes and shook her head, deciding to divulge her experiences at the oddities shop, the ghost in the haunted mirror, as well as the old diary. Lyra showed them the old journal and related the story of what she had read in it so far. Nevin was sitting on the edge of his seat actually listening to the story for a change instead of interrupting with rude comments, which was his usual habit.

When she had finished retelling Zaethian Laurent Salé’s account of the creepy manor where he received a demon’s bite, Nevin was flushed with excitement. He said he knew someone back in London that owned an occult bookstore and who also had access to several of the university libraries housing rare occult texts, Nevin copied down the references from the diary and promised to enquire after the entries relating to *‘The Satoricon’*, Count Aristos Argotscoli, *The Loagaeth Club* and the alchemist from Prague, Strigo Mancentu.

“Before we head out for lunch, I demand to see your haunted mirror Lyra, perhaps I’ll buy it from you so I can have a dreamy ghost lover to flirt with, it will make Rodney so jealous,” Nevin teased.



“Not if he likes me best Nevin, your breath is as bad as your attitude, you old witch, it’s foul enough to scare any ghost away,” Rodney said as he sidestepped to avoid a swat from Nevin who lashed out angrily, attempting to smack him in the head at the gybe.

“Now who’s being a vicious sod?” Nevin did a catwalk pivot, tilting his chin up in a dramatic pose and followed Lyra to the upstairs bedroom.

When Nevin saw the old gold framed looking glass with a dark murky glass he screamed. Hearing the cry, Rodney ran up from behind them, “Did you see it, was it the ghost?”

“My gawd, look at my dark roots, my hair colour is all patchy, it looks like a cheetah got splashed with a bottle of peroxide, and look at these orange spots. I need to get my hair done before we go out tonight, this will not do at all. Is it me Lyra, or your mirror that makes me look so tarnished?” Nevin was running his hands through his hair examining strands of it in the mirror.

“Where are you two going tonight? You didn’t say on voicemail what brings you to Edinburgh, I know you didn’t come here just to harass me.” Lyra stood with her arms folded across her chest in a defensive position.

“One of our friends is acting in a theatre production tonight and then after the performance were going to a party with the troupe, but we’ll be leaving for London before noon tomorrow after we have breakfast at our hotel,” Rodney explained.

“That’s a long roundtrip train ride, only to stay for a couple of nights in Scotland,” Lyra stated.

“We know, but we’re being adventurous. It doesn’t sound as interesting as your meeting strange tall merchants in a



disappearing shop or being haunted by a ghost in a dingy old mirror,” Nevin giggled, poking fun.

Seeing her crystal sphinx on the shelf of the chiffonier, Lyra walked over and held it up to them, “Oh, I forgot, I also got this from that weird shop.”

In unison both Nevin and Rodney yelled, “Dust collector!”

Nevin reached for it, held it for a moment then put it back on the shelf disinterested. “It may have been okay for the 1970’s but now you can’t even use it for a paperweight. Hello, we’re all paperless, everyone’s gone digital already,” He scoffed then snorted.

“Well, if your phantom isn’t going to appear, we’d better get going to lunch, I’m famished and craving Indian curry,” Rodney said impatiently.

As they headed back downstairs, Lyra turned round to give one last glance in the mirror, seeing only a misty shadow within.

After an entertaining luncheon which consisted of pretentious gossip, wild gesturing and cacophonous laughter by Nevin, who also assumed the role of table diva at the restaurant demanding all the attention, Lyra had a headache. She was fond of them but could only take their energetic pulse of life in small doses, was she really becoming an old fuddy-duddy? God forbid.

Lyra was glad to be home to enjoy the quiet surroundings, the silence so deep, she could probably hear the light flutter of butterfly wings.

She picked up the diary of Zaethian Laurent Salé from the table, reclined on the sofa and began to read where she left off.



CIRCA 1900'S

I returned home from Scotland planning to make travel arrangements to embark on my new quest, determined to find answers about the portals mentioned in *'The Satoricon'*. That night I had experienced a dream of an old fortuneteller. It appeared to be so real, the gypsy leaving such a strong impression in my mind, that I abandoned seeking answers in İstanbul and decided to do some research on daemons before going to France.

Little did I know that this was the beginning of a never-ending dark curse. The daemon's mark would plague me with psychic disturbances that had me living in a continual nightmare, as ghosts and hell-spawn chivvied me nonstop with the vibration of their evil presence. I felt them always, watching, whispering and filling my dreams with such surreal and otherworldly visions that I began to question my own sanity.

I was neither tempted to return to the oddities shop nor *The Loagaeth Club* for answers. I wanted to distance myself from both Lasyrith Lubat Kayn and Count Aristos Argotscoli, wishing I had never met their acquaintance, as I blamed them for my predicament.

I resolved to send correspondence to Lord Tymesdale, giving him an account of what had befallen me after investigating the count's cellar, and confirmed the existence of the hidden chamber below it that his housekeeper spoke of.



I spent my days searching through books for ways to remove my supernatural curse, but most of the material I had uncovered bordered on the absurd, written by crackpot mountebanks promoting the sale of their own handmade charms, herbal remedies and scrolls with magick spells of their personally concocted mumbo-jumbo all intended to make money for themselves with their fakery, rather than offering a genuine solution for the afflicted.

It requires great strength of one's will to keep these beguiling and deceitful daemons at bay, they are collectors of shells and will possess any vessel that does not fight to control them.

Each night I gaze into the black mirror yearning for its dark enlightenment that comes in flashes of such beauty, and seeing the light manifest in its dark glass fills me with hope.

I see a woman clothed in strange raiment radiating with light, her smile lightens my heart, sending my thoughts soaring on wings of joy and I realise this is another aspect of my angelic self which is free from the darkness, knowing only bliss in her paradisiacal realm and I desire to cross over through the glass into that infinite world of light, but I am chained, a prisoner in a maze with evil spirits and foul black serpents. Thus my quest to break this curse goes on.

To my surprise, I received a parcel from Count Argotscoli with a letter stating his regret that my stay at his manor was cut short, and that he hoped I enjoyed the mementoes he sent. My surprise went to disdain when I opened the package to find '*The Satoricon*' grimoire and the odd French oil painting. This book was still following me and I wondered if the alchemist's ghost was also here with it.

My first reaction was to throw '*The Satoricon*' in the fireplace and burn the infernal thing, but then I questioned Count Argotscoli's motives in sending me the old book, wondering if I had



offended him, now that he was aware I had discovered his tome hidden in the painting's niche. Perhaps he sent these to me in spite, but regardless of my repugnance of its dark arts content, I decided to delve into it further hoping to find a remedy for the daemon's bite that has scarred me for eternity.

I retreated to my study to read, and with much trepidation opened *'The Satoricon'*.

As I turned the faded pages studying the outré drawings, I came across a particular portal image that shocked my psyche even though I did not understand the meaning of the strange symbols; they seemed to be affecting me subconsciously. As I stared at the circular gate, my vision began to warp and blur, shifting my reality into a vortex. I felt myself travelling at a tremendous speed, experiencing exhilaration beyond words. My thoughts projected into the beyond, streaming globes of energy from my consciousness, creating a multiverse of worlds, each one reflecting my soul like a hall of mirrors.

In an instant all motion had stopped and I found myself in a chimerical landscape, where everything floated on air. It was a world of winds that vibrated with a howling tune, playing a sonata of echoes. I ascended drifting stones that carried me to possibilities. I no longer felt the burden of my curse but was uplifted by the prospect of seeing millions of opalescent bubbles, each holding a potential outcome of my future, and all I had to do was choose one.

I felt a sense of triumph as these images became embossed on my very being, associating the threads of all my experiences and emotions they evoked in my soul. I stood in awe as all the indeterminate patterns of my life unfolded into a multitude of



creations forming a resplendent fractal, so alien and fantastic, knowing without a doubt that all art is eternal.

Suddenly the whispers began and I was swept back into the portal, but this time by force, as if being deliberately pulled by a malevolent energy, I was now travelling into an obverse world. I felt a gut wrenching pain as I punched through the tunnel into utter darkness, whatever this entity was, it resented my exposure to that realm of light and the sigil on my neck began to burn as though my skin was on fire.

I was on my knees in a black tunnel befouled with daemon's breath; the foetor rose up from the ground asphyxiating me with nauseous vapours. My sense of equilibrium was off and I stood up wobbling, feeling ill as I choked on the fumes.

A dull red glow now appeared revealing my surroundings. It was like looking through a scarlet fog and to my arrant horror, I caught a veiled glimpse of thousands upon thousands of living beings embedded in the walls, their faces contorted in agony. I was in a cavern of souls. I bowed my head staring at the ground unable to look at them, for my heart was deeply distraught with sorrow and pity.

I stumbled forward in revulsion towards the distorted false light, as my mind whirled struggling to comprehend this disturbing and surreal realm of human degradation. I felt an intense cold terror before I even lifted my head to look, and when I beheld the grotesque form on his throne of bones, I shuddered uncontrollably with fear upon seeing his lip curled in a vehement sneer of contempt and hatred for all of mankind. Behold Rex Mundi.

I began screaming and felt myself being yanked through the gateway as my vision contorted into a whirling mass of blended images, while I heard the King of the World's malefic soul-chilling laughter echo through time and space.



My eyes snapped into focus and I saw the open book in front of me, I was sitting in my study breathing deeply and I cried out, instinctively throwing the tome on the floor in disgust to get the accursed manuscript away from me. I looked round my study, everything appeared normal and unchanged, the only thing that had been altered, was me.

Speaking aloud to my empty room I quoted,

*“Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbræque silentes,¹
Et Chaos, et Phlegethon, loca nocte tacentia late;
Sit mehe fas audita loqui: sit numine vestro
Pandere res alta terra et caligine meras.”*

I wept bitterly, for I was in fear of losing my soul to Tartarus, the prison of the damned.

Like a two-edged sword, the tome was a dichotomy, giving me the euphoria of idyllic visions and rapturous emotions, but then it had a darker side, an evil so powerful it could consume your soul. Still in shock, I rang for tea and decided to lock the book away in my desk drawer, needing to recover from the negative vibration resonating throughout my being. It would be some time before I could even think of touching it, and again I wept.

¹ “Ye gods, to whom belongs the empire of ghosts, and silent shades, Chaos and Phlegethon, places where silence reigns around in night: permit me to utter the secrets I have heard; may I by your divine will disclose things buried deep in the earth and darkness.” Virgil - ‘Aeneid’



Lyra closed *'Nuances Éternelles de Nuit'*, feeling numb. Her emotions now petrified after swinging from ecstasy to horror. She became retrospective and was saddened by the choices she had made in her life that now flooded her with regrets, her fragile world was crumbling all around her; everything she had ever loved was lost, Shiva the destroyer had come to rid her of all attachments. Never recite the Mahamrityunjay Mantra unless you are willing to pay the price. Be careful what you wish for.

She went upstairs and stood in front of the gold framed mirror watching it reflect the shadows, and felt herself travelling downstream through cool damp fog, past towering riverbanks clouded by the darkness until she came to a silver lake. The still waters captivating her with their glass-like reflexion as she sailed silently to a hidden place beyond the mists.

Lyra tore herself away from the looking glass and picked up her crystal sphinx from the shelf, holding it up to the light she saw her blurry reflexion superimposed on its face as if alive, embodied with energy capturing her soul. Was it her imagination, or could she actually feel the stone pulsing with life? She had her new living tree and a living stone. Replacing it, she shrugged her shoulders and got into bed drifting into a frosty dream as the melody of *Alessandro Marcello's Adagio in D minor* played in her head.

She was trekking through the snow in a remote area of Patagonia, searching amongst the massive glaciers for the gateway of Osiris leading to another world. Antarctic winds blew across the frozen wasteland and she huddled against the stone face of the colossal jagged mountains for shelter from the bitter cold, but by



taking another step closer, a loud cracking sound erupted as the ice beneath her broke away and she fell into a deep chasm.

Falling, falling, falling, she was slipping away, transcending time, losing all direction, centuries waned, the world shudders, the earth decays and crumbles before her eyes as she landed upon a ledge that spanned across the bottomless crevice forming an ice bridge leading to an enormous cave.

Lyra exhaled a deep breath to shatter the silence, and walked towards the cave listening to the hollow echoes all around her as her steps made crunching noises in the powdered snow. Large icicles hung from the entrance and moving into the centre of the cavern she was awe-struck by the sight of a giant crystal sphinx of unfathomable beauty, fluorescing with iridescent light that reflected off the cyan coloured walls of ice, and eyes shining like diamonds filled with rays of sunlight.

She felt a quickening as her heart fluttered with exuberance and the core of her innermost-self flowed with an overwhelming sense of harmony as the glacial chamber resonated with an ominous voice.

*“Do not be blinded by mortal treasures
For they are empty trinkets of a child’s folly
Or seek after sinful pleasures
That bring woe and melancholy
Let a new sun be born within your heart
With joyful music to make you sing
Tempering your moods to make them bright
And where only love should reign as a king
To pass beyond the veil into the light.”*



The Loagaeth Club

PRAGUE - CIRCA 1700'S

Strigo Mancentu sat coughing near the entrance of his place of worship where he had just come from, and collapsed in impuissance, into the cold night air after what seemed like hours of veneration and pleading. Sick from consumption, he knew he had uttered his last prayer and thought this would be his final night in this accursed world, his whispered orisons, just wasted breath amongst the splendour of the magnificent edifice, and his lost words never heard by his deaf god.

People passed by him revolted and embarrassed at seeing his degraded state, refusing to acknowledge his existence as another human being, shunning him like a pile of discarded rubbish.

It was on this fateful night that Strigo Mancentu lost faith in God and humanity. No one cared if he starved, no one cared if he died, least of all the god whom he had praised for these last fifty years of his lifetime. He coughed violently as he tried to rise from the ground, if he was going to die tonight, he would at least do it in his own bed.

An extremely tall man appeared suddenly from the shadows as if materialising from out of nowhere. His elegant physique was astonishingly perfect, he was completely bald, and his abnormal bleached white skin looked almost inhuman like some Rigelian Lord



from a distant star. Seeing Strigo struggling weakly to erect himself, the mysterious stranger stooped his large frame and grabbed Strigo's arm, lifting him up with ease.

"Thank you kind sir, I am most grateful for your help." Strigo said as his chest rattled through fits of hacking.

"Allow me to introduce myself, I am Lasyrith Lubat Kayn. Please let me accompany you home to ensure that you are made comfortable." Lasyrith's lazuline eyes flashed in an instant like molten black stone, and then returned back to silvery powder blue as he guided Strigo with his long arms, herding him like cattle.

"My name is Strigo Mancentu, I would welcome your assistance but I fear I cannot repay you."

Lasyrith held up his hand, "Enough, there is no need to discuss repayment of debts, I am only doing what your fellowman should have done, simply offer aid to those afflicted. I find the inhumanity of man quiet intolerable. Come now; tell me your story as we walk."

So Strigo began the long tale of his life, full of misfortune, betrayal, and suffering. Life was hard here in Prague, they were all poor, they were all starving, and if you were not rich or held a prominent position then you lived like rats, scurrying and scrounging each meal to stay alive in a daily struggle to survive. They were treated as vermin by those of wealth and power. There was no charity, no compassion and they had no hope of making their conditions any better. Nothing changed here, nothing ever changed.

The two walked down a cobbled alleyway through a squalid neighbourhood in the immigrant quarter, as Strigo wheezed in discomfort, exerting himself with every breath and wondering at each if it would be his last. They came upon a dilapidated old boarding house where Strigo fumbled to unlock the door of his



small shabby room, his only possessions consisting of a cot with a filthy blanket, a few eating utensils and a bowl on a small rickety table. Lasyrith lit the half-melted candle, knowing that Strigo must have used it sparingly, since light was a luxury he could ill afford. Most people in this ghetto would spend what meagre earnings they had only on food. Lasyrith gently eased the man onto his bedding and as if by magick, produced a small vial from the interior pocket of his long black wool coat and handed it to Strigo, demanding that he drink it.

The sick man winced when he swallowed the foul tasting black liquid, looking like oily dark waters from the River Styx, and wondered why he should trust this gentleman, as Lilith's inscrutable brew burned in the back of his throat. Strigo began drifting away and lying down, sank into the deep oblivion of a whimsical and narcotised dream.

His deplorable surroundings melted away. He was enveloped in light grey fog clouding his vision and felt the warmth and humidity in the air as vapours rose up from the ground, the sun piercing through the canopy of enormous trees heating up the wet earth. The heady smell of the damp bark, blossoms and leaves were a perfume that pleased his senses. He walked forward on the narrow dirt path dodging branches from the thick jungle foliage on either side of him, breathing as if alive and it filled his mind with images, as a myriad of sounds melded into a living symphony of exotic bird song, primate cries and the stridulation of insects, twisting his perception into a sea of green. He knew he had found the beauty of Eden.

Before him on the path stood an ancient structure that once housed a magnificent garden, but was now encased in tangled vines, nature reclaiming the temple wrought by mortal hands as if to erase its memory, just as its builders who were already lost in time. He climbed the steps of the great ziggurat to the summit, elevated above the treetops to be bathed by the full light of the blazing sun, and the



grand illuminator galvanised his mind with new insight of opportunities to come. In that Mercurial moment his heart pulsed with fire and his body regained wellness and strength, feeling the power of light course through his veins as he stood at the gateway of all truth previously beyond his understanding, but now acknowledged and believed.

“Natura inest in mentibus nostris insatiabilis quaedam cupiditas veri videndi.”¹

Strigo woke up in his hovel stunned that he was still alive. He thought he should be dead. He noticed that his breathing was normal, his chest no longer heavy with congestion nor did he cough. He saw a note with a generous stack of coins on the small table. It was from the impressive gentleman he met last night, although he thought it had all been a dream.

The note from Lasyrith Lubat Kayn stated that if he sought opportunity for amelioration, it advised him to arrive at *The Loagaeth Club* three days from now at 10.00 pm. It gave some vague instructions on the location and suggested procuring new attire for the appointment. The amount of coins left for him, was exceedingly more than was needed for just one set of clothing. Strigo felt in such good health that he scooped up the coins to get a good meal and a bath, smiling with enthusiasm for his change of fortune.

When he thought about last night, he found it odd that the gentleman took him directly to his room, yet he never told Lasyrith where he lived, the stranger seemed to lead him there as if already knowing, or could he have read his mind? He had been so sick; it could have been his memory that had failed him.

¹ Nature has implanted in our minds a certain insatiable desire to behold the truth. - Cicero.



Another thought crossed his mind, perhaps he should just keep the money and not show up at *The Loagaeth Club*, fearing what motives were behind this generosity, but then he realised when the money ran out, he would be in the same predicament.

He was desperate, and after reflecting on his euphoric dream, he decided to accept this bunce, whatever the cost may be.

Strigo Mancentu felt like a new man. Well dressed, bathed, shaved and engorged with food, he set off with self-confidence and zeal to locate *The Loagaeth Club*. There was no address given, but rather riddled directions of a sort, leading him to one point of reference to another, indicating to go north, east, south or west at each marker. Strigo had turned down a blind alley thinking he had made an error, and held up his candle to survey the perimeter.

There were no windows on the buildings on either side of him and he felt an abnormal sense of fear, the walkway had ended at a stone wall so he turned around to retrace his steps. He nearly missed it, but when his candle flame caught a reflection from a small brass plaque attached to the building wall, he noticed the engraving of an Egyptian scarab on it, and there was immediate recognition.

There was no other sign indicating that this was *The Loagaeth Club*, but it was the same symbol that was stamped on the letter of instruction by Lasyrith. He inched forward and saw that the dark recess in the side of the building led to a large black door bearing a tarnished bronze doorknocker with a ghoulish face.

Count Aristos Argotscoli sat in a private room of the exclusive club, patiently waiting for his new initiate who was now



late, but Count Argotscoli was in no way perturbed, he knew all about patience, when you lived in eternity, you learned patience. Count Aristos Argotscoli was a vampire, and he had all the time in the world.

His master, Lasyrith Lubat Kayn, was a formidable Übermensch who brooked no argument and all his vampire kin were subject to his authority. They did as they were told, without question. Lasyrith was a collector of souls, and his recently acquired lost lamb was to be placed in Count Argotscoli's care to be schooled in the mysteries, cultivating his soul for growth to receive the light of wisdom, becoming a perfected man.

Only one out of a hundred and forty-four thousand initiates ever succeeded. The price for those who had failed was an endless hell of rebirths and mortal suffering, and of course all of their wealth and property reverted back to *The Loagaeth Club*.

The Loagaeth Club of vampires had property all over the world. Every century the vampires changed their residence with one another so as not to attract the attention or suspicion of the locals for their unnaturally long lives.

Strigo Mancentu lifted heavy ring and knocked on the door three times, the thunderous sound echoed through the night air and shattered his resolve. He was beginning to have second thoughts and was about to turn around and run before anyone answered, when the door was opened by the Tyler holding a lit candelabrum. The soft glow revealed his pallid complexion, and his sinister eyes gave Strigo such a fright, he only mumbled, not knowing what to say.

The doorman grabbed him with his other hand before he could get away and pushed Strigo into the grand foyer, slamming and bolting the large black door behind him.



“This way if you please sir, you are expected.”

The man led Strigo down a long candlelit, marble hallway lined with pillars and displaying statues of mythological gods and beasts. There were numerous closed doors on each side of the corridor leading to unknown chambers. He did not know what to make of the décor, it looked rather macabre. Strigo followed in silence and was shown into a large salon decorated with plush furnishings in rich fabric, beautifully crafted tables holding colourful vases and old oil paintings of queer, surrealistic and hellish scenes. He noticed there were no windows in the room.

His escort excused himself, leaving Strigo bewildered, just staring blankly at the impeccably dressed man in front of him, until Count Argotscoli spoke to calm his fears. The count rose to greet him and waved his hand towards a velvet settee in invitation.

“Please, do come in and sit down. May I offer you something to drink, wine, brandy or sherry perhaps?” The count remained standing waiting for Strigo to find the courage in his voice to reply.

“Thank you, it is a pleasure to meet you sir, my name is Strigo Mancentu. A glass of brandy would do me well right now, I am afraid I’m somewhat overwhelmed by all of this. I was given a letter to come here, but I do not exactly know why.”

After serving his guest, and waiting for Strigo to get a few sips down him to calm his nerves, wanting him numb, compliant and accepting, the count explained the deal to him.

“My partners and I own a small bookshop that specialises in rare recondite texts that appeal to only a certain coterie. I would like you to work in the bookstore, some of the scrolls and ancient papyri are crumbling and I need you to copy the texts and symbols before they turn to dust and become lost. I will not trust these valuable manuscripts to a printer’s press. There is also a need for the inventory to be catalogued which should take you some time.



“Payment shall be delivered to you by our solicitor, who has his own key and will drop off a package each week, leaving it behind the counter in the evenings, since he is unavailable during the day.

“There are comfortable lodgings upstairs above the shop where you are to live, and you should not be disturbed by any customers whatsoever. Our clientele are eccentrics who have a penchant for rare and arcane texts, and I will handle any inquires personally.” The count refilled Strigo’s glass with more brandy.

“The offer sounds too good to be true. How did you know I could write?” Strigo asked suspiciously, since only few people knew he used to labour in a scriptorium, until a little indiscretion got him expelled, causing him to flee, and he did not tell Lasyrith Lubat Kayn the night he walked him home, or did he?

Strigo searched the count’s penetrating brown eyes for a hint of betrayal but found none. His dark hair contrasted the paleness of his skin tone, and as Count Argotscoli spoke, Strigo’s distrust seemed to be soothed by the count’s mesmeric tone of voice.

“We have our connections, and those with talent do not go unnoticed.” The count raised his left eyebrow and his moustache twitched, his lip quivering as if trying to hold back a bemused smile of some private thought.

Strigo asked about the elusive Lasyrith Lubat Kayn, but Count Argotscoli expertly manoeuvred around each question, clearly evading answering, and changed the topic of discussion. There was a prickling in the back of Strigo’s mind that something was not quite as it seemed.

“Why was I asked to come here at night? This place was almost impossible to find in the dark,” Strigo asked, drinking the remainder of his brandy in one gulp.



*“Nox noctis est nostri.”*² The count replied in a hypnotic whisper.

“Very well sir, when would you like me to start?”

“Why immediately of course. I will have Xandiel escort you to the bookshop tonight. He has no problem seeing in the dark. We have already taken the liberty of stocking the larder, everything you need has been provided for you,” Count Argotscoli waved his hand in the air as if casting a magick spell, then continued, “There are detailed instructions on the writing table describing your duties, I am sure it will answer all of your questions.”

The count handed him the key to the bookstore, the large black metal key was embellished at the end with a knob shaped into a human skull.

Strigo took the cold metal object, examining it, and he could have sworn the skull grinned at him as if alive.

Suddenly the guardian of the club, Xandiel Heim, appeared by his side without Strigo even seeing him walk into the room. He thought he might be light-headed from the fine brandy. He thanked the count, shaking his hand in appreciation and was hurried away by Xandiel before he could get another word out.

Xandiel wove his way through the pitch dark, guiding Strigo around the tables and shelves of the bookstore without having to light a candle and deposited Strigo in the upstairs dormitory. The vampire whispered a few words and Strigo Mancentu fell instantly asleep in the softest bed he had ever felt, and dreamed.

² The night is ours.



Threads of memory filled his mind with forgotten tales of his timeless journey. Many lifetimes recorded in a giant crystal within the centre of the earth, his engrams imprinted for all time. He was an ancient traveller with starlit eyes, transcending darkness to behold the light, and like a sea that rolls upon endless waves of chance, tasting the infinite for his life to enhance with a perfected heart. His love did blossom into a journey of One, which is the Greatest Work of Art.





Ars Diabolus

Booksellers of the Occult

PRAGUE - CIRCA 1700'S

Strigo Mancentu sat hunched over his scribe's lectern carefully copying the old leather bound collection of fragile papyri by candlelight at the shop, *Ars Diabolus - Booksellers of the Occult*.

Over the years Strigo had tried in vain to make conversation with the scrawny little solicitor that crept in the bookstore at night, he would only glimpse him occasionally, but by the time Strigo got to the front of the shop, Jerel Nevis was gone, elusive as wisps of smoke on the wind. The old man was skeleton-thin, clothed in black, hat and all. Jerel entered with his own key, left a packet of brown paper containing Strigo's wages, then disappear without a trace.

If Strigo needed any shop supplies, or writing materials, he was instructed to leave a list of his desired items, which the sneaky solicitor would deliver the following week. On several occasions, Strigo waited up all night in order to confront him, only to find that he had suddenly fallen asleep each time, missing the man's visit entirely.



He painstakingly laboured at his tasks for years now, recreating blasphemous images with instructions for calling upon the powers of darkness, opening channels to consort with daemonic beings, and he was becoming obsessed with the magickal texts he was working on. He started delving into the dark arts, experimenting with magick spells, and dabbling in alchemy to gain more knowledge. The continual exposure to these unholy images, symbols and scripts were affecting his mental state.

He was beginning to believe in the incantations that promised wealth, power and beauty beyond imagination, and decided that he would use one of the spells to obtain riches of his own. His arthritic hands ached daily from constant writing and even though Count Argotscoli provided him with spectacles, his eyes tired easily in the dim light. He resented the count in his posh club and elegant attire, and Strigo felt entitled to the same abundance that its members enjoyed.

Strigo had already wondered if he had made a pact with the devil when he accepted the count's offer, and although his pay was more than adequate, there was so much work to be done, he rarely had the time to enjoy and spend his wages. He no longer wanted to be anyone's slave, and with those thoughts, the stealthy snake of envy slithered into his heart.

Strigo had been so engrossed in his work that he forgot to pick up food. He decided to get away from the manuscripts and walk to the market street to buy his meat, bread and wine. He looked forward to going out since the only human contact he had was conversing with the merchants or having a few polite words at the tavern he occasioned.

Across the way, a group of young ruffians had been observing Strigo purchasing many items, and assuming that his pockets were



full; they saw the older man as an easy target and planned to rob him of his property. Strigo hastened back to the bookstore, his arms laden with provisions, and as he turned the corner was met by three hooligans blocking his way. He turned around to run but two more large hulking lads appeared from behind him. He was trapped, and before he could get a word out to confront his assailants, a very tall, completely bald man, having almost translucent skin, stepped into the middle of the scene from an unknown origin.

Lasyrith Lubat Kayn remained silent, he only had to glance at the thugs and terror shredded their courage, sending them fleeing with pewter grey threads of energy wrapped around them in a strangling embrace, like the tentacles of a Hydra from the bottomless pit, feeding on them internally, sucking the soul out them until there was only a husk of empty flesh. The five of them vanished, screaming all the way, and each one of them would have the most horrific nightmares for the rest of their life.

Relieved, Strigo addressed him, "I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you my friend. I feared my fate had once again caught up with me, a thousand times, thank you! But please tell me how five men can become so afraid; there are only two of us?"

"I am glad that I could be of service to you once again. The answer to your question is power, and it can be sensed by those around you. This world is ruled by money and power. Accumulate enough of it and people will behold you as an Adonis," Lasyrith stated, seeing the lust in Strigo's eyes and knew that Strigo would do anything to obtain both.

"Tell me, how is your situation working out?" Lasyrith said changing the subject.

"Very well, and thank you," Strigo said somewhat grateful, but then a thought crept into his mind, if he had such personal power



as Lasyrith, he could make men cower and women swoon, he too wanted the power of the gods, and in that instant the worm of jealousy ate at his heart.

Lasyrith stared at him, searching his soul and quoted, *“Auream quisquis mediocritatem diligit, tutus caret obsolete sordibus tecti, caret invidenda sobrius aula.”*¹

Strigo said farewell to Lasyrith, eager to be on his way. As he was walking, his mind kept mulling over the many texts he was copying, and it was as if the words of the manuscripts were whispering to him, enticing him, and he began to get grand ideas.

He entered into *Ars Diabolus - Booksellers of the Occult* with resolve. He was thankful he did not die and had avoided a skirmish, but felt defenceless and he never wanted to be so helpless again. After eating his meal, Strigo retrieved the catalogue of the inventory he had compiled and reviewed the index with the description of the contents and set out to find the most potent spell for him to gain instant affluence and power.

Abandoning his work he searched through countless scrolls, vellums, papyri, clay tablets and books, until he finally found a reference to an extremely efficacious ritual that was copied from a clay Mesopotamian tablet called the KÅlon Süde, and centuries later it was bound into a grimoire called *‘The Satoricon’*.

The description gave countless warnings regarding the dangerous undertakings of the spell, noting that it would bring death to the conjurer without the proper magickal protection.

¹ “Who makes the Golden Mean his guide, shuns miser’s cabin, foul and dark, shuns gilded roofs, where pomp and pride are envy’s mark.”
- Horace; John Conington



Strigo's interest was aroused and he went to the rear of the shop where the *'The Satoricon'* was stored in a small black granite vault on a marble plinth.

There was an image of a daemon carved into the black stone lid, having giant wings and thick legs that looked part bird and part reptilian. The heavy stone box was tightly sealed and Strigo needed some kind of tool to open it, but first he would have to read about the magickal protection, so he gleaned the catalogue and found a reference to a scroll for performing binding ritual.

It was past midnight when Strigo performed the spell from the scroll, taking great care that he did everything correctly. He was now confident that he would be safe from any harm and lit several oil lamps around the room, then wedged a chisel under the heavy black granite lid of the box housing the rite of the KÅlon Süde within the book, *'The Satoricon'*. While prying it open, he decided he would malversate the old tome, coveting it for his own.

The lid slid over the stone, making grating noises like the opening of a forgotten tomb, as the flames of the lamps flickered by some foul disturbance that rushed through the air. Examining the contents, he picked up a large peculiar bowl covered in Persian writing, it had been placed upside-down over the book, as if to trap or contain something underneath it, and he thought it might be some kind of warding.

As Strigo held the bowl up to the light to read the script, he could have sworn he heard a soft voice vibrate through the air, sounding like a distorted groan speaking slowly, demanding, "Release me; Rrrreeellleaaassse Mmmeeeee."

The voice startled him, and his shaking hands dropped the clay bowl, shattering it into innumerable pieces. Strigo sucked in his breath as all the flames extinguished throughout the bookstore and he froze for a moment in fright before collecting himself,



remembering the binding spell, and feeling self-assured that he had nothing to worry about; he relit the lamps while laughing at his fears.

He went back to the stone vault and lifted out the large black leather book that was underneath the inscribed clay bowl, it was surrounded with the littered remains of dead things. Small skulls, bones and decayed offerings that now looked like ash, lined the bottom of the box. Strigo took *'The Satoricon'* to the reading table and immediately became engrossed in the texts.

It told of gateways and angelic guardians promising the betterment of humankind, his eyes lit up with malicious satisfaction, he felt exhilaration as he read, but he was unwilling to go through the long process it necessitated, it would take years to unveil the book of gates, it was too slow and he did not want to do the work to perfect his soul. Full of avarice he skipped to the back of the grimoire and found the spell he had read about, the rite of the Kålon Süde.

The ritual gave sigils to write and words to recite.

*"Those who write my name by night
And speak my name on autumn's moon
Will be granted the visions of godly sight
And treasure to fill a thousand rooms
Those who bring me blood to feed
Power will I give that surpasses none
And beauty to charm the wildest steed
All hailing you as the omnipotent sun."*

Strigo Mancentu had just taken the step over the threshold, forsaking his soul for the material world as he performed the first part of ritual, wanting prosperity first.

When he copied the daemon's sigil, he felt a burning pain in his own neck, as if the mark was searing into his flesh. Then using



'The Satoricon', he gazed into one of the drawings of the black portals, reciting the nine names of the supernatural beings.

He found himself above the entrance of a cenote, vines hung down from the top of the giant hole, reaching into the clear teal blue waters inviting him to explore this paradise. Discarding all the old idols of his soul, and jumping from a great height, he dove into the unknown waters promising all of his ambitious dreams, his shapeless desires taking on forms of selfish things. Matter warped, moulding into every want his heart could conceive, heightening his emotions for the love of golden ornaments that gleamed.

He swam through the turquoise halocline sea into tunnels that became a wishing well, reflecting his inner-most thoughts that were hidden deep within his being. He surfaced from the magickal waters that seemed a potion that granted each person's hopes, and emerged into a dark cave without sunlight, staggering amongst stalactites that dripped like blue beads, each droplet echoing as it fell, producing sine waves rippling with possibilities, consequences and causality.

He rested upon a rock shelf in the blackest pitch, catching his breath until it stilled, and in this silence the darkness beckoned to reveal the unspeakable horrors of what his soul most feared. Undead denizens came to feed upon his greed, and three hundred spiders covered him like a blanket, biting and crawling under his skin, sending poison through his veins, and as the blackness devoured him he cried out in excruciating pain. He entered through a hellish gate, with a hoard of voracious beasts salivating with blood red eyes, and rising from a black abyss appeared a creature of eternal night, and he screamed at the most terrifying daemon born from his own mental seeds.

Bête noire.



Strigo regained consciousness. He did not remember passing out, but was mortified by his terrible vision. Picking himself off the bookshop floor, he noticed a parchment on the table with scrawled writing on it, as if written by a madman. Then upon closer examination, he realised, it was his writing, but he had no memory of it, as though another entity possessed him, automatically using his body to express its words. It was instructions telling him to go to a cemetery and gave the deceased name, birth and death, and that he would find his treasure there.

It was still dark when Strigo snuck out into the night, entering the cemetery and robbed the grave of a nobleman, who thought to take his hoarded wealth with him in the afterlife. He was astounded at the amount of riches and devised a plan to transport every last piece of precious jewels, gold, and silver items into his possession. Each night he would come with a cart and empty out the mausoleum, and then he would leave the country and this paltry life behind. He would no longer be Thoth's scribe

After returning to his room above the bookstore, he unloaded all the treasures he was able to carry. He rubbed the mark on his neck; the daemon's bite was a small price to pay for his newly acquired wealth, and full of joy he laughed as he got into bed.

Little did he know, Strigo Mancentu had let something out so ancient and so evil that his fleeting joy would turn to agonizing torment for many years to come. With visions of objects ornately filigreed in silver, golden grails to drink fine wine, luscious pearls offering no wisdom, and red rubies of princely cut and colour which a true philosopher would shun, he drifted into an elated dream.



He was deep within the earth gawking at the veins of precious metals flowing like rivers in the sides of the rock, coloured jewels and brilliant diamonds glittered, bringing a lust for them in his heart. He saw a large number of gnomes mining the valuable stones and as they were working, he heard them sing,

*“When we ask heaven for things we do not receive
We blame the Divine for not providing
With bitter hearts our soul does grieve
And our world is completely shattered
It’s not for the love of gold that we should be striving
But the gold of our Love that really matters.”*



Eternal Shades of Night

SCOTLAND CIRCA 1700'S

Strigo Mancentu fled Prague with his new found wealth and took passage to Scotland, purchasing a large estate home in the remote countryside. He had developed a feeling of superiority, treating those below his station with condensation and disdain, his egocentric words and deeds divested the last thread of his noble-self, transforming into a gloating dragon sitting atop his hoarded treasure. After years of living in privilege and luxury, the black root of pride grew in his heart.

When Count Aristos Argotscoli found out that Strigo had run off with his property, he was by no means worried and laughed at the foolishness of the man, thinking he could hide from a vampire's sight. Strigo had failed, he was trusted with all the rare knowledge that the bookstore contained, yet instead of using it to perfect his own soul, he damned himself by applying it for his own selfish gain. Count Argotscoli knew it was just a matter of time before he reclaimed his book and confiscated Strigo's manor for his own as soon as Strigo paid the ultimate price for his unpardonable transgression.



Strigo attempted to move within the circles of high society, wanting to be accepted by others of affluence and position, but besides being an outsider and a foreigner, he did not have the sufficient eloquence to impress, nor the gift for expressing clever witticisms to entertain, and quite frankly did not really have anything interesting to say. He failed miserably and stood alone in a grand salon, watching as the fashionable élite interacted, impressing everyone with their charms, magnetism and grace.

It was then Strigo realised that what he lacked was power, and leaving the social scene behind, he sought the grimoire he had stolen from *Ars Diabolus - Booksellers of the Occult*.

In his secret room below the cellar, he had set up a small laboratory and an area with a black altar having a circle scribbled with symbols on the floor for experimenting with magick.

For years he had been trying to exorcise the entities that plagued him with horrendous dreams from the daemon's bite, concocting various formulas from herbal infusions and chemicals so he could sleep in peace, but the elixirs only enhanced the phantasmagoric oneirisms, driving him slowly but surely to a form of madness he could never escape.

He opened the grimoire; there was a choice of two paths he could travel and Strigo knew that he wanted the Adamas Ater, he wanted to become a god.



Strigo became impatient when he discerned how long the magickal operation would take, at least a lifetime, perhaps many, but he was old and did not have the time, so once again he planned to invoke the rite of the KÅlon Süde from the back of *'The Satoricon'*.

He placed a black cauldron in the middle of the circle and following instructions, called forth a King of Darkness who ruled many legions, to bestow upon him great power that surpasses none, and by feeding the kettle with animal blood he hoped to gain his prise. The sound of fabric tearing like the opening of a fissure in this material realm echoed throughout the room, followed by a malodourous air, and Strigo trembled in fear as he weakly held his wand out, looking like an imprudent child playing at a game, not knowing that it was real, as the mighty Niyazian appeared before his eyes.

Strigo's bravery fractured, words failing him, and he let out an unintelligible whimper at the sight of such a marvellous personage.

"Well, mortal? Why have I been summoned? Just to watch you cringe at my feet?" Niyazian boomed out in a thunderous voice, followed by malicious laughter.

Strigo's cracking and wavering voice choked out a soft reply, "I command you to give me power for the blood I have supplied, so I can rule over the lives of men and be held in high esteem, becoming a god myself to created everything I dream."

"Ha! What arrogance you have to think that this paltry dead bird is a sufficient offering. The cost for what you desire is that of human sacrifice. Come back when you are willing to pay the price." Niyazian vanished as Strigo's wand fell to the floor with a clink, the disappointed magickian unable to hold the being to do his bidding, and he set out to find a victim for his wicked designs.



Strigo Mancentu ambushed an inebriated man walking home from the local tavern, and shoving him in a cart, wheeled him to his dreadful lair. The man was still alive but unconscious, and just as he was about to finish the deed, a vision of Lasyrith Lubat Kayn appeared in a glowing blue light, and a voice from the stars admonished and beseeched him not to do this unholy thing, assuring him that pride always came before the fall, then knowing Strigo's mind, quoted,

*"Facilis descensus Averno;²
Noctes atque dies patet atri janua Ditis;
Sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras,
Hoc opus, hic labor est."*

Strigo ignored the voice of warning; he had free will after all, and proceeded to commit an atrocity against his fellowman in his lust to receive power. Feeding the black cauldron within the circle, and feeling smug that victory would be his at last, Strigo summoned Niyazian with an exacting voice, demanding his reward.

The King of Darkness appeared, and seeing the blood of another mortal shed, condemned poor Strigo to suffering in the blackest depths for his crime.

"You murderous swine! How dare you take another man's life in exchange for glory and power, it was your life that was required for sacrifice to achieve the golden flower. Your deed is already done, and there will be hell to pay when the time of your death comes, you will never know rest, never know mercy and shall remain forever in Eternal Shades of Night," Niyazian pronounced his fate and was gone, leaving Strigo weeping upon his knees.

² "Smooth the descent and easy is the way;
The Gates of Hell stand open night and day:
But to return, and view the cheerful skies,
In this the task and mighty labour lies," - Virgil; Dryden



Full of regrets and frequented by vivid images of infernal beings that promised unspeakable tortures in his mind, he found a binding spell to seal the black pot for all time, placing a skin with sigils of protection, wrapping chains with restraining spells to keep that king of daemons, Niyazian, from ever returning, and tore up the flooring, burying the accursed cauldron in a black box. He nailed the floorboards back in place, and then recorded all of his research and experiments in the grimoire, leaving notes behind of all of his findings as well as his many sins.

For years he had tried to find a way to remove his curse, and discovered that an ennead of daemons guarded the dark gates mentioned in the black tome, and in trying to redeem himself from the vile black hearted fiend he had become, he accidentally set free a legion of forty-nine minor daemons, that fed on the landscapes of his insanity created from his surrealistic dreams, the entities tormented him continually, and he knew he shall find neither peace nor atonement.

He wondered if the worlds were all ruled by mad gods, black magickians creating universes, while still retaining their individual narcissism to reign supreme. Self-born Brahma emerging from a lotus out of Vishnu's navel seemed to him a strange mystery, sublime, yet achievable from all that he had read and seen in his visions. There was dark gate beyond the ten, II called the Al Badu.

Strigo wrote his last entry in '*The Satoricon*'.



The Satoricon



Portae Inferi

The portals, they are mirrors. Nine gates of light and nine gates of darkness, they are reflections depending on your choices. I have managed to contain a most powerful denizen of the abyss in a cauldron sealed with protection, and leave this account as a warning. Do not break the seal. The gates of Light must be opened to dispel the daemons of darkness in the nine layers of night, only then will one be free from the curse. Remember the two keys, one in Istanbul and the other in France, near Rennes-Le-Château. There lies the only hope. It is too late for me, I fear my time is at an end, and my eternal hell is about to begin. Through the darkest nights of my soul, madness has taken its toll. Choose your path wisely.

Strigo Mancentu

Scotland. 1784





Theatre of Shadows

CIRCA 1900'S

Zaethian Laurent Salé was sitting in his study opening the morning's post. He had received a reply to his letter from Gunther, suggesting he meet a friend of his, Professor Luther Pernodis at the university, who is an expert in Elizabethan demonology, as well as Egyptian, Sumerian and Chaldean magick. Gunther had already contacted Professor Pernodis, who said he would be happy to receive him, so Zaethian set off to the university to visit him that afternoon.

He was greeted by the professor's assistant, Hester Arbuthnot, a tall, thin fellow wearing a benign expression, and his prominent Adam's apple bobbed on his throat as he spoke while escorting Zaethian to the professor's office. He was led down a long hall and entered the room as Hester retreated, and Professor Luther Pernodis introduced himself, gesturing for Zaethian to have a seat in a chair across from him. The professor was an older man in his late sixties with thinning grey hair, had a small frame and wore a hunter green cardigan sweater over his starched white shirt.



They engaged in polite small talk, exchanging a few words about Gunther, (Lord Alfred Tymesdale) and then Zaethian explained the strange events that took place while staying at Count Argotscoli's manor in Scotland.

"That is certainly a fantastic tale," Professor Pernodis replied after he had finished recounting his experience, "Do you mind showing me the mark you received?"

"Not at all," Zaethian said unbuttoning his shirt collar exposing the otherworldly sigil, and after examining the mark, Professor Pernodis sketched a copy of it with pen and paper.

As he wrote down the daemonic sigil, a cloud passed over the sun that was a moment before, shining through the office window, a cold chill was felt as the temperature dropped in the room and the affable atmosphere they had just shared turned into an instant foreboding as if the sudden gloom enveloped them in fear.

"Extraordinary," remarked the professor.

Zaethian commented, "This type of phenomena and eldritch presence that is attached to me also affects my dreams. I brought the book for you to examine, but be careful; it seems to induce a state of astral projection and travel." Zaethian reached into his leather satchel and produced '*The Satoricon*', handing it to the professor.

The old man took the book reverently, "May I?" He asked, putting on his reading glasses, curious, and wanting eagerly to read it.

"By all means, please do." Zaethian gestured towards the tome in invitation.



“You have nothing to worry about, I am a scholar, not a dabbler in these things, I have handled countless anathematised books on black magick and feel quite safe, it’s all in the mind you know. Most of these texts are meant to act upon a person’s subconscious, but with some it may influence them on a deeper level causing psychosis if they’re not careful.”

Hester Arbuthnot arrived with a tea trolley, laden with finger sandwiches, small cakes and a plate of macaroons.

After pouring out tea for both of them, he said, “I’ll leave you to it then,” exiting the room as silently as he came in.

Zaethian enjoyed the refreshments as Professor Pernodis engrossed himself in the old book, taking copious notes, commenting to himself and ignored his tea as he gathered all the information he could from the book, before closing it and handing it back to Zaethian an hour later.

He tried asking a few questions regarding the contents of the book, but the professor was non-committal, unwilling to speculate until he had definitive answers.

“Well now, give me a few weeks’ time to do some research and I will see what I can come up with and report back to you. In the interim, I have a colleague who would be interested in meeting with you. If you feel restless because of this troubling business, he may be able to offer an alternative of great interest, and it would also give you something else to focus on,” Luther Pernodis wrote on a small scrap of paper, handing it to Zaethian, “He is usually at this location in the evenings from nine until midnight.”

Zaethian thanked the professor, who was now absorbed in the notes he had made, and mumbling as he sipped his cold tea. He placed the book back in his leather satchel and glanced at the



rumpled piece of paper before depositing it into his coat pocket. It read Beldus DuCayes, St Ermin's Hotel - St James Park.

On his way home, he gave some thought to the professor's words. Since returning from Scotland he had not sought out any of his friends, accepted invitations to social gatherings, or visited his club. After a while people stopped calling upon him since he refused everyone, giving a multitude of contrivances to rid them off his doorstep, which was well and good, because the servants were tired of making excuses for him. He had hidden himself away as if he was infected and was afraid that those around him might sense the daemon's presence. He was damned, but he also needed an escape.

He ate dinner and took '*The Satoricon*' from the satchel to lock it back up in his desk in the study, but something compelled him to open it again, drawn to it by whispers of enthrallment. He felt his pulse quicken, tingling with excitement as he opened the grimoire and energy gathered around the room, propelling him through an open gateway, flying free with the rushing wind high above the earth, until he came to a giant stone forest. The alien rock formations looked like they were from another world, tall jagged peaks covered with striations mixed with other giant eroded smooth stones rising up from a lake of emerald green water.

A large vertical crack appeared in the sharp grey rocks as if opening in invitation. He slipped through the crevice, travelling down a passageway illuminated with a phosphorescent carnelian coloured glow and came upon a grove of enormous quartz crystals. A group of tall beings with large silver eyes and pale white skin were gathered around each crystalline pillar watching the preserved images displayed within its glassy surface.



He moved closer and saw that all the memories and details of his life were housed in the crystals and the strange beings were watching as each picture was exposed, and he gasped in horror that his innermost thoughts were not his own, having an audience of watchers critiquing each experience of his existence. One of the tall creatures having three eyes turned towards him reading his mind, and said, "Can't you see?" pointing to the moving scenes of his life.

He felt a great pressure inside his head as he tried to see beyond into a different dimensional field, past his current life but his vision was only clouded by a fog in his mind and he replied, "No, I don't see, how can I see?"

The being handed him a gelatinous egg that shone with nacreous blue hues, and through the transparent cocoon he saw an embryo of his unborn self, waiting to burst forth and merge with him as one. He turned around screaming as he realised this inhuman thing wanted to become him and he ran in revulsion through the darkness repeating, "Now I see, I see!"

Escaping the stone forest he came to a vast open, fertile green field and in the centre was a majestic tower erected to staggering heights, the bright sun illuminating its beautiful architecture, as thousands of people wearing glorioles crowded around it in adoration as if it was their own creation. He was elevated as the outer vision mirrored his inner bliss, until the axis of his being unified with a different reality.

Suddenly the skies darkened, the sun became shrouded, as if draped in black clouds and the heavens cracked with pealing thunder, rumbling monstrous threats like Typhon, quaking the very earth as fierce bolts of lightning flashed upon his Olympian edifice, and a behemoth black snake spewed out molten fire from each one of its hundred heads, incinerating and toppling the opulent structure into a heap of rubble upon the ground.



His material world now obliterated, his spirit broken, and the deconstruction of his knowledge, idealisms and beliefs, all lay in total ruin. The great tower of Babylon has fallen.

Yet he felt calm in this aftermath of annihilation, a sense of peace flowed through him, carrying him away like a leaf upon a tranquil stream, and in his devastation he found strength. He was able to form a bridge over the breach to cross the black rift into another world in a different time and space.

Zaethian's psyche was shaken and he closed the black book and placed it in the drawer of his desk.

The following evening Zaethian went to St Ermin's Hotel and was informed by the concierge that Mr Beldus DuCayes could be found in the bar, and was attended to by the lobby boy who pointed him out in the crowd. He was a man of medium height, estimated to be in his early forties with wavy reddish brown hair, beady green eyes that looked over his large nose and his mannerisms were effeminate.

Zaethian pardoned himself for interrupting the group, requesting to have a private word with Beldus DuCayes, who moved them to a quiet table in the corner of the room. Zaethian introduced himself and explained that he had been advised by Professor Pernodis to contact him.

Beldus DuCayes was a practitioner of mysticism striving to develop his own psychic powers, and upon hearing the professor's name, knowing the scholar's occult interests, deduced that the professor had sent Zaethian to him because he must possess the necessary qualities, having a magickal influence about him to become a player in his game. So he cleared his throat, and with a charismatic speech attempted to persuade him to join his cabal.



Beldus elucidated that a branch of the Foreign Secretary's Office was recruiting agents for a specialised section that would work abroad gathering strategic information. Beldus admitted he was sort of a talent scout, seeking those who were intuitive, having a keen sense of awareness or preternatural ability for discerning the truth, and that having this gut feeling could even save one's life in a dangerous situation. Those with a heightened insight able to read other people was essential in their type of business and he assured Zaethian that although it could be perilous, he would have the time of his life, and glossed the package up with romantic scenes of lavish parties with foreign dignitaries, heroic duty, and the pride of nationalism, spouting all the glories of being a silent warrior.

Zaethian stared at him in disbelief after hearing the long embellished sales pitch, "I think you must be mistaken about me, I am seeking to escape society, not mingle in endless circles to conduct espionage. I thank you for your time, but I fear mine is a different fate."

Zaethian noticed the disappointment in the other man's eyes, like a fish that got away. They shook hands and parted, and he wondered what made Professor Pernodis think he would want to engage in such a sport.

He returned home and went to bed in an exhausted mental state. His mind was spinning like a carousel in a theme park of chaotic scenes as sinister looking clowns, and wildly costumed performers with freak show deformities all coalesced into a hideous carnivalesque dream.

He was walking down by the docks in the wharf district, and heard the sound of fog horns blowing from ships at sea, wandering along the boardwalk passing crowded shops and noisy



taverns with music and conversation spilling out of the doorways filling the air. He darted around the people milling about in all directions as if navigating through a living human maze.

There was a large building ahead of him and he entered finding yet another building within it, thinking how strange this had seemed, like nesting dolls hidden one within another, ad infinitum. He entered in the grand gallery, and taking the stairs up to the second level saw an impressive decorated hallway with many doors on each side of him. He knew that the key was finding the right door and so he travelled down the never-ending corridor in pursuit of this quest. Appearing to have no exit, the hallway kept going on and on forever, there were only different rooms that you could inhabit in each lifetime, it was like being in a distinguished hotel, but you could never leave.

He stopped all movement, remaining perfectly still becoming disconnected from the deception of this world around him, and the carpet began dissolving from under him as the walls warped, the illusion flickered as if the scene was trying to maintain its projection.

Then he saw it, amongst the luxurious hallway with gilded doors, was an odd sight, an old door with worn wood and cracked black paint having a bronze doorknocker with a ghoulish face. Around the doorframe the wallpaper was yellowed with age, ripped and water-stained as if neglected by time. He grasped the cold metal and knocked three times, the door swinging open as he entered in.

Inside, the space opened up into yet another grand building decorated in Victorian style mixed with an eclectic mélange of furnishings and décor from many countries, giving it a bohemian atmosphere. The room was crowded with elaborately dressed stage performers, some kissing in seductive embraces, others eating and drinking as if their whole life was a party. There was a loud mixture of conversation, laughter and the hollow and scratchy metallic sound



of orchestra music playing in the background from a Victor phonograph.

They were a guild of players, and he was met by one of them who seemed very familiar, as if he had known them from another lifetime so long ago, and the connection was only a vague recognition, like a ghost of a forgotten memory that hung hauntingly wanting to be recollected but faded like a dream. They told him he had been chosen to be one of the troupe, becoming a player in the greatest production of all, and that scripts would be written for him and he would be called when he was needed to play the role.

So he wandered around the numerous rooms observing the enchanting company and took the lift up to an imposing theatre with thousands of tiers and balconies. Props were being changed, and the giant stage was being set as the crowds filled the seats to watch the never-ending performance. The characters were all the same, but each lifetime they played a different part, once hero, now villain, the script just kept being rewritten but they were all trapped in this black comedy, the eternal drama unfolding again and again.

He ran down the aisle to the back of the theatre trying to exit. He wanted out, but when he opened the door he was in a horseshoe shaped lobby with no windows or doors, only a staircase that rose high up to an elaborately painted dome where a group of actors dressed in random fancy apparel sat at tables on a terrace, laughing and going on as if nothing was wrong, accepting this prison as if it was their real home. After climbing so many steps he was mortified, it was like ascending the cliffs of logic only to find madness at the top with the cast of characters attending a twisted tea party in the insanity of his dreams. A great Lila for the entire world to see.

He was about to despair, but when he looked up, a light came down from above as if the painting of the seraphim on the ceiling came alive and sent him a spark, and moving towards the light he left the show, he would take part in this grand illusion no more.





HELLFIRE

CIRCA 1900'S

Late one night, Professor Luther Pernodis was seated at the reading table in the occult library of the university absorbed in a book. He would unconsciously doodle the daemonic sigil over and over while he was thinking, aimlessly scrawling the mark repeatedly until he had filled sheets and sheets of paper, trying to riddle out its meaning. He had become almost obsessive over the enigmatic mark that was burned into Zaethian's skin, and he had been investigating it for over a fortnight, consulting numerous texts, and finally he found a reference to a daemon named Niyazian from Ctesiphon, an area in Ancient Babylon.

He also noted that many centuries later, daemon bowls inscribed with incantations were made as a trap to capture these types of entities for protection. The professor wrote down all of his findings he had compiled over the weeks to show to Zaethian, and as he returned the book to the shelf, he thought he felt someone behind him. Through the eerie silence he imagined he heard the many orphic books whispering their secrets, as thousands of voices



spoke at once quoting its dark arcana, the very shelves coming alive, possessed. The professor turned around him to see if anyone was in the room, but he was all alone.

Shaken, he gathered up his materials and headed back to the residence hall. He remembered being so immersed in the research he had forgotten his dinner and concluded that he must be getting lightheaded from lack of nourishment.

Once back in his room he made tea and got out a tin of biscuits, munching on them while writing a letter to Zaethian Laurent Salé, reporting what he had discovered and suggested another meeting, also requesting another opportunity to take a second look at the book he had brought with him.

He addressed the envelope and left it in a tray for his assistant to post, lit his pipe and stared at the wisps of smoke floating through the air while his mind kept going back to *'The Satoricon'*, and deep in thought in the hazy room, spoke the name out loud, "Niyazian."

He thought he heard movement in the room, and turned round to look behind him but saw nothing out of the ordinary. A creeping awareness came upon him, as if he knew something was here with him and that he was not alone, feeling a malevolent presence emitting dark energy of sinister intent.

Professor Pernodis coughed and choked on his pipe smoke as he started seeing thousands of black beetles crawling through the room, and he became possessed, the daemon using him as an empty shell, and picking up his writing instrument he began scrawling Niyazian's sigil over and over again, when he ran out of paper he used the walls, when he ran out of ink he used chalk, when there was no more chalk he used paint, until the entire room, walls, and floors were covered in the daemoniac writing.



All the time he was writing he was entranced in a terrifying nightmare, seeing visions of beings with bat-like wings who tortured souls with the bite of their beastly fangs, draining the blood with a burning pain. He was running through a volcanic wasteland of charred trees and the ground was covered in grey ash as he fled from the horrors in his head. A swarm of biting black flies chased him to the ocean's edge, and then he fell into the thick murky waters of a dark polluted sea, and swimming in panic as something caressed him from beneath, swallowing mouthfuls of putrid waters in between his screams, as hordes of decomposed corpses bobbed to the surface from churning up the seabed by his kicking feet. He heard nefarious laughter and the grating voice chuckled out,

*"Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate."*¹

So slowly, so graceful, the colossal black octopus surrounded him with its many arms in an enfolding embrace, the kraken's tentacles squeezing as he felt the many suckers boring into his skin, like something was drilling black holes in his mind, and the universe before him became just a thin membrane of Swiss cheese, having more hollows than substance.

He was getting hot, combusting from within; feeling like his skin was on fire, perspiring at first until the searing pain became overwhelming as his nostrils were flooded with brimstone, the sulphurous stench of Hellfire. He was burning alive!

Although he did not believe in supernatural forces, the professor realised his mistake, by writing a daemon's sigil, he was playing with fire that now consumed him in his own funeral pyre. There were some powers that existed which one should never take lightly.

¹ "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." - Dante, *'Inferno'*





Chariot of Apollo

Lyra Swan had finished planting her garden plot and went inside the house to wash up then checked her email. Nevin had come through for her, reporting the information he found on rumours of a time gate in the Rennes-Le-Château area and attached a map with the grid, but there was absolutely no information on '*The Satoricon*', his friend thought it must be some necromancer's private grimoire.

As far as the elusive Count Aristos Argotscoli was concerned, there were no records of birth or death in the databases for this person, anywhere, either the records were destroyed or he was using an alias.

"Okay, Nevin, I'm sorry for being mad at you," Lyra spoke to the laptop screen, promising not to berate him anymore and carefully examined the map he had attached. She noticed a jagged ridge that ran through the area, there was also one depicted in the oil painting as well, and she wondered if there was any correspondence between the two. What if it was the same place?



The thought was both chilling and exhilarating at the same time, it hinted at a mystery. She shut off the computer and after eating dinner went upstairs to read, passing by her mirror she saw again the ghostly image in the ebony mists, the prisoner of shadows, and she wished she could break the glass to set him free dispelling the darkness. He smiled thinly as if reading her thoughts then faded into the gloom while she sighed with sadness, and opened the diary of Zaethian Laurent Salé.

❧ *Nuances Éternelles de Nuit* ❧

CIRCA 1900'S

It had been three weeks since I had any word from Professor Luther Pernodis, until his assistant, Hester Arbuthnot, came to visit me and was shown into the parlour where I received him.

He apologised for not ringing but felt it was necessary for him to come in person, not just to deliver a letter from the professor, but also to impart the bad news of his death.

Hester explained the bizarre circumstances surrounding the professor's untimely demise, his body was discovered completely incinerated, yet nothing else in the room had been burnt, and the entire room was covered with daemonic writing.

There were rumours amongst the faculty that he might have gone mad and somehow set fire to himself, but the whole tragic incident is being hushed up so it does not reflect badly upon the university.



I thought instantly of the professor copying the sigil from my neck, at least when I opened the cauldron in Count Argotscoli's manor, I was in a circle of protection on the floor of the sub-cellar.

I invited Hester to stay for tea, seeing that he was still distraught, but he refused, claiming he needed to get the professor's papers in order so his replacement can assume his lectures, and after saying farewell, I went to my study to grieve, feeling that his death had been my fault alone.

I should have never involved another person in my accursed fate. It vibrated waves of consequence and brought misery to those around me, deciding that I alone must combat this daemon and never risk another soul to its dark embrace.

Full of guilt, I opened the professor's letter and read it through tearful eyes. Professor Pernodis conveyed the daemon's name and origin, but also noted that he thinks he may have found the key to the reference made in some of the notes in the '*The Satoricon*' regarding İstanbul.

Apparently there are remnants of an old serpent column dedicated the solar deity Apollo and he thought this might be an important clue in my quest, since the tripod was associated with prophetic powers and oneiromancy.

In my despondent state, I gave word not to be disturbed and retreated to my study, still searching for answers and consulted my bane, '*The Satoricon*'.

The locked drawer clicked open like the toll of a distant bell announcing my own death as I sought to face these infernal fires, to arise like a Phoenix from the ashes of my pyre, resurrecting again like an unborn god to a new race of glorified humanity, and I plunged into one of the gates, falling into a whirling tunnel full of monochromatic streaks, seeing pulsing threads of light in the blackness of space, ending my darkest night.



I was in a dense forest surrounded by pines, I became drunk by the smell of sap hanging thick upon the air, mixing with the aroma of wet bark beneath my feet.

A satyr was romping merrily playing his pipes and hearing the alluring tune, I followed after him through the woods, filled with the seven octaves of his song. He led me through a grove veiled in both mist and mystery as I sought the core of the forest, the heart of hearts of an omnipotent tree.

Moving through the sacred grove I felt the pulse from the giant tree vibrating with the energy as from a distant star and I knew it was the key, receiving three blows by Thor's hammer, I fell to my knees seeking mercy from judgement.

The satyr pointed to an opening and I descended into the hollow travelling down to the roots of its foundation and saw a glowing seed that longed to gestate and sprout into a new reality, beyond time; it belonged to another world, a different continuum longing to seed new groves of souls for their ascension.

A vine grew out of my navel, an umbilical cord like Ariadne's thread, as a golden bee hovered above my head raining down sweet honey, flowing to feed a flower of exquisite beauty, the waters coalescing with blood from the right side of my forehead.

A white worm bored into the centre of the tree of life, pouring out beams of intense light for all hearts to receive, seeing the Nirmāṇakāya in the central sun. Golden petals unfolded, opening my heart as the nectar of ecstasy filled the grail of my being, becoming a wellspring giving life to all creations as the sacred waters streamed into the universe like time bubbles floating on a breeze, future aspirations conceived by the need to create a new world, shifting this current planetary domain into a higher state.

I sought a forest of infinity beyond a meretricious lifetime of routine. I kindled a fire in the base of the tree to dispel this



darkness for all eternity, and knew in that moment of rapturous glory, that I needed the chariot of Apollo to sail to the centre of the sun.

I closed the book realising it repeated the same theme and resolved to travel to France to discover the key to my freedom, and if I did, would I really want to leave?

Could we create new worlds with green rocks, blue sand and purple skies from our imagination, or was it the same planet earth ascending into a new time continuum? Perhaps I am just being rash and courting a disaster to come, thinking about the tale of Phaethon in ‘Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*’, when he asks Apollo to borrow the Chariot of the Sun.

Lyra closed the journal and thought about Truth, Vedanta, Fitch’s Paradox of Knowability and Quantum Indeterminacy. What was the real truth?

*“Imprimisque hominis est propria veri inquisitio atque investigatio.”*¹

If we were reincarnated, then why don’t we have complete recall of our past lives each time we are born? It would certainly save a lot of trouble if you remembered the last lifetime so you could learn from your mistakes and not have to start all over again from scratch. It was too bad we could not just recover our lost memories and restore them from the recycle bin, unless each of us were all ‘One Hit Wonders’ and you only get one life, she supposed whatever the truth was, she’d better make the most of it while she was still alive.

¹ “The first duty of man is the seeking after and investigation of truth.” - Cicero.



Her head hurt from trying to think about these things, as if a zombie ate her brain, and wanted an answer to a real question that had been nagging her for years, why do cartoon characters always wear the same clothes, are people thought to be so dense they can't recognise the face of the character if he changes his outfit?

Lyra rang up Nevin and told him she had decided to go France and see if she could find the spot on the map and asked if he and Rodney would care to go with her, but he said they couldn't since they were already planning to go on a Mediterranean cruise for their holiday. She promised to keep in touch then rang off and booked her travel arrangements, then took a digital photo of her oil painting to take with her along with the map to help locate the same spot. She felt silly for being so impulsive, taking off on a whim, but she knew she had to see the mysterious region for herself, and to follow her heart. She got out her suitcases and started making a list of things to pack. Three days from now, she would be in France.

She chanted, "Om Mani Padme Hum," rather than falling asleep to the telly.

She was walking in the gorge of a strange kingdom where the barren surface was covered in ochre Martian sand, and towering shards of black metal protruding from its surface, looking like sharp blades of hematite that absorbed the scalding heat of the punishing sun making them too hot to touch.

Ahead of her was an enormous cliff face and she saw no visible way to climb it so she walked along its edge and noticed strange symbols etched in the eroded rock inscribed by travellers from long ago. She trudged on to escape the burning rays and shrill winds that howled like ghosts haunting the canyon, following the ancient signs to a small archway between the cliffs and entered into the blessed coolness of the shade. Seeing a faint glow from a crack above, she traversed an ascending trail until she was high atop a plateau and was astonished when she beheld a giant Sphinx gate.



There was a black obsidian sphinx on the left side and a crystal sphinx on the right, the imposing lions like great ferocious guardians who would devour snakes and those not warranting merit. With anticipation she entered through the Lion's Gate to find a golden chariot of light, and excited by the prospect of riding through the skies, boarded the vehicle for flight, guiding the chariot to the starry canopy. Soaring high up in the purple tinged clouds she flew and came to an elegant swan palace unequalled to any on earth, giving her a message of hope. A majestic eagle sat upon the dome of which shone with golden hues, supported by columns of lapis lazuli.

There was a swan-filled lake with floating lilies and rolling green carpets of lawn all around it where peacocks fanned their iridescent feathers in an elegant dance. She heard doves cry amongst the weeping willows and walked upon the pristine white marble path to the palace entry. Higher harmonics vibrated 'Satchitanada', a traceless mystery of the divine intelligence filling all space. Then she heard a melodic voice inside her head asking, "Child, why have you come?"

She answered with a limitless longing in her heart, "For divine grace. I have come for clarity, seeking higher states of grace," weeping profusely, for her soul was in desperate need of some.

She was granted a new pentagonal star, the light of which showered her in joyful bliss, and opened the gate to Shangri-la.

*"Sweet are the uses of adversity,²
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."*

² William Shakespeare - 'As You Like It'





PEARL OF ATLANTIS

CIRCA 1900'S

Zaethian Laurent Salé gazed into his obsidian glass mirror to look upon the lady radiating with light one more time before stowing it away, and after recording his last journal entry, he sealed his diary, *'Nuances Éternelles de Nuit'* in the cavity between the picture frame and the back of the old oil painting he had received from Count Argotscoli, then throwing the book, *'The Satoricon'* into the hearth watching it become thoroughly consumed by the flames, he left his study and boarded a ship taking passage across the English Channel to France, sailing around the coast to the Bay of Biscay, where he stayed at a hotel in La Rochelle.

He relaxed for a few days before the next phase of his excursion and decided to visit a museum in the area, walking slowly through the collections contemplating each work of art that caught his attention, and absorbing the images that conveyed a psychic message to his subconscious.

He came upon a disturbing painting that began to swirl, distorting his perception into an opening and he stepped through the frame entering into the picture, transporting him to a gruesome



scene of blackened skies above the earth with a slash like a tremendous wound as though a mighty black rift had been cleaved into the heavens that stole the very light from Orion, and allowing the dark goddess Kali to rise, emerging from deep within the core of the earth surrounded by fire, fear and death.

The heavens trembled as time was falling, shockwaves descending from another stream, and the displaced waters tore from fathomless depths creating colossal tsunamis destroying the mighty city of Atlantis that was swallowed by the angry seas. Such a bold attempt was made by these arrogant Atlanteans priest-kings, with covetous eyes seeking divine power and daring to steal creation's fire like common thieves, leaving humanity thrown down wrapped in illusion and sealing their piteous fate, as the sirens wailed a lament to Poseidon's lost sunken kingdom beneath the consuming maelstrom.

The force of such destruction shook him from his inner vision and slowly he warped back through his reverie to stand in the sterile halls of the museum, just staring at the painting as though he had seen man's history of a long lost time, and mourned the causal karmic effects for all the fallen souls that lost the eternal light, tears forming in his eyes as he thought of mankind's demise.

Zaethian gathered his composure and left the building to have an early dinner at his hotel while mentally assimilating the transcendental occurrences affecting him, and he thought it was strange that he no longer needed *'The Satoricon'* to stimulate these insightful flights of astral projection.

He began to see the world as a grid, where marked points related to different coordinates in space-time, and by some force he was able to access this fabric-like structure to view events recorded from different eras.



After his meal he wandered around the port town, visiting an old commanderie once inhabited by valiant knights, and then walked to the water's edge listening to the waves lapping against the shore on his way back to his hotel room where he settled placidity upon the bed with thoughts of a forgotten realm drowning in his head.

He was swimming underwater in the depths of the indigo ocean amongst crumbled stones and ruins of an ancient temple encrusted with different types of coloured corals, and surfaced into its sanctuary breathing the damp air. An old man sat lost in retrospection, he had sad eyes that drooped along with his wrinkled skin, and he sat on a pile of debris surrounded by pieces of pottery, bits of jewellery and trinkets of gold, remnants of a bygone civilisation, and seeing he was not alone, he turned to speak,

“The world has changed so much, what we once knew, our knowledge, our past, our science, our magick, has all been lost in destruction. We try to piece together our vague history from scraps of artefacts and fragments of old scrolls and steles that might empower us with an understanding of who we are now, and who we once were.

“Trying to find some scintilla of our existence, some thread to connect us to our ancestors and their ancestors before us. Our origins and histories are mostly contrived stories by creative imaginations of historians and priests, but it is the truth that we seek, and only ‘Truth’ that matters. Our records and libraries were lost in the havoc and destruction of the great calamity that happened long ago.

“What remained of that knowledge was hidden from us, kept secret by Archons and with their divine deceit, would blind us for their own power and control over us.



Their crime of demolition is easier to forgive than the lie used to cover it up, the act of betrayal thus adding even more guilt to the crime.

“The world wants to be deceived because the lie is easier to accept than the truth. All we really have is our intuition and to trust in our own true feelings. The only thing I have left is my vague and distant memories of a world I once knew, but is now disguised in a circus of façades.

“I beseech you to leave this fallen place, for there is nothing here but broken dreams, rather find the precious pearl of wisdom and rebuild a New Temple, one with an aeonian light that will never cease.”

Leaving the forgotten city, he swam through emerald green waters of a kelp forest and came upon the wreckage of a sunken pirate ship with a hole blown into her starboard side, and he floated through the opening to see rusted armour laid down by knights only to take up flags of piracy from the look of the giant treasure chest in front of him. He lifted the corroded lid and sifting through the plunder he found a giant clam, prying it open he saw a magnificent pearl, shining like a living miracle just as Venus is depicted in her scallop.

As he took the cherished pearl he heard the music of the universe, and he saw geometrical shapes form from the vibrations of the sounds, as though the beloved bard Orpheus charmed it with his harp, playing his divine song. He became enraptured by these celestial harmonies, and rose up from the sea to sail upon white feathery wings like an immortal swan through the vault of heaven to the constellation Cygnus for the boundless grace of his redemption.





HEART OF ORION

CIRCA 1900'S INTO FUTURE TIME

It had been a tiring journey from La Rochelle and he decided to rest up a bit before embarking on his search for the time gate. Zaethian welcomed the relaxing thermal waters of Les Banhs de R nnas where he had been staying for last three days and had also visited Rennes-Le-Ch teau just a short distance away. He was ready to leave the darkness behind him and knew this world desperately needed to ascend into a new reality, the wool had been pulled over his eyes far too long, he was finished with the illusion and wanted to move on to find the light.

He had an early dinner and wearing the travel clothing he had purchased from safari outfitters in London, filled his haversack with a canteen of water, a picnic spread and a bottle of wine, leaving that evening for Burgarag. The beauty of nature solaced him as he walked the few miles in the stillness of twilight, and upon reaching the town, turned towards Saint-Just-et-le-B zu to hike through the countryside. He knew exactly where the portal would be, it was like



coordinates marked on a map in his mind, pulling him with a magnetic attraction as if Orion's sword cut through the mortal distraction bestowing absolution, and using his second sight Zaethian found the time marker and rested under the divine canopy, laying upon the ground gazing up into the sublime heavens marvelling at the stars, and wondered why he was not amongst them, then fell asleep under the sentinels of night.

From the void of the unmanifested god, a great blaze appeared like a pulsar flashing codes of light, and he saw the lady from his mirror oscillating with blue starlight, releasing the trapped light of Sirius that grew brighter with recursive waves of love beating from his heart, restoring his lost estate. She was a part of everything that gave life, and like links of a chain she bound them together with her light, revealing lost memories of twin moons and almighty love that blooms like a diamond flower symbolising everlastingness, and ending his long journey of night, the crystal teardrops from Pleiades fell upon him as ethereal dew awakening him to a new dawn.

Zaethian awoke to see Aurora bringing a blushing sunrise that burned across the morning skies dispelling his shadows, and in its xanthous light he saw the stargate to the heart of Orion.

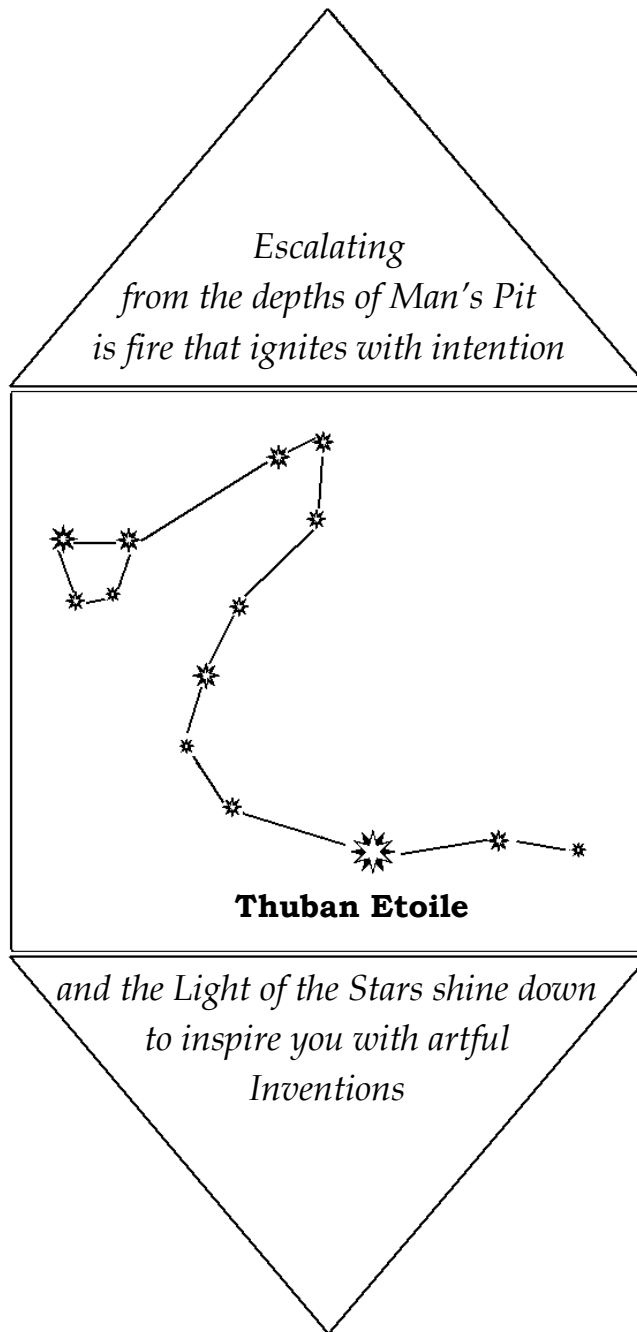
Thinking he had opened The Devil's Door which held the mystery of the great unknown, he entered through the portal unlocking time and dissolving gravity, as energy fields wrapped a torus around him transforming him into a Knight of Capricorn. With the song of Rigel resonating in his heart, he rode his steed across the chessboard of all worlds and universes to play the most ingenious game while travelling back and forth through time.

*Our life's story doesn't need a spectacular ending,
just the amazement of our New Beginning.*





About the Author



PORTAE



INFERI